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# There's No Place Like Home: The Haunted House as Literary Motif

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## Abstract

This thesis traces the development of the haunted house in British and American literature and covers a time span of roughly two hundred years. Its approach is chronological: beginning with Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto, it examines the use of the Bad Place as a literary motif, emphasizing the consistencies in its development while noting the inconsistencies as well. From Walpole to Stephen King, we see that the haunted house has continuously represented two things. On one hand, it may serve as a repository for unexpiated sin. The traditional haunted house, in fact, is nothing more than the prison of an earth-bound, essentially good spirit who has in some way been wronged and is bent, therefore, on alleviating its own suffering. The ghost may, as a sideline, demand proper burial or serve to warn of an impending catastrophe, but once he has wreaked revenge by exposing the person responsible for his death, he disappears, presumably freed from Purgatory and allowed to enter Heaven Proper. Such is the case in Walpole's Castle and in Clara Reeve's The Old English Baron, as well as in a number of late nineteenth century works; in a slightly different way, it is also the case in works like The House of the Seven Gables and "The Jolly Corner," for the sin "housed" need not be a tangible sin of the flesh-- it may be a sin of character instead. In The House of the Seven Gables, for instance, the "ghost" that haunts the Pyncheon house is

elitism: Hawthorne's gloomy, ramshackle mansion is a symbol of dead aristocratic ideals. "The Jolly Corner's" ghost, on the other hand, is narcissism: Spencer Brydon's house is empty, we learn, because its owner is devoid of any sense of compassion for others.

Besides acting as a repository for unexpiated sin, the haunted house also serves as a kind of psychological mirror capable of reflecting-- and often preying upon-- the obsessions of the characters who reside within. The governess in The Turn of the Screw, for example, is a strait-laced Victorian prude; in and around James' haunted house, therefore, materialize two characters with notorious sexual histories. Most often it is guilt that the haunted house reflects, but it may also be authoritarianism, sexual desire, or jealousy. Often, too, the haunted house as mirror may merge with one of the other interpretations. The house of Usher, for example, at once mirrors and magnifies the guilt and instability that form the core of Roderick Usher's anguish, and at the same time represents the incestuous family whose sin requires expiation. Thus, haunting's two basic sources are often as inseparable as subterranean passages from gothic castles.

Of course, like the chameleon, the haunted house was not content with a single color: it demanded several, fortunately, and in the years subsequent to Walpole's efforts, donned many different hues. In Robert Marasco's Burnt Offerings (1973), the house represents a ghastly micro-cosmic death/rebirth cycle in which human sacrifice is prerequisite to the house's own rejuvenation. In Charles Beale's The Ghost of Guir House

(1897), the house, a tangle of ivy and worm-eaten wood, is a symbol for man's less-than-ideal existence on earth. The house represents the womb, a haven, in both James' The Turn of the Screw (1898) and Oliver Onions' "The Beckoning Fair One" (c.1935), while in Algernon Blackwood's "The Other Wing" and James' "The Jolly Corner," it is synonymous with the human mind. Such redecorative trends reflective of the times have not, however, precluded the haunted house from consistently acting as a repository for unexpiated sin and as a psychological mirror. These consistencies-- along with the inconsistencies-- will be traced in greater detail in the thesis following.

There's No Place Like Home:  
The Haunted House as Literary Motif

Kansas's favorite pigtailed star forsook a dancing tin man for it; Laertes' son deserted an enchantress's bed. No matter that Dorothy and Ulysses lived well over a thousand years apart-- one thought was central in the minds of both: there's no place like home. Home, so the aphorisms go, is where the heart is. It's where every man is king, where, when you go there, they have to let you in.<sup>1</sup> But look again. There, on the hilltop, looming over the town like a vulture with folded wings, is the Marsten home. The yard is a tangle of witch grass that laps the porch, the house the weathered gray of shadows, blacker between the boards nailed haphazardly across the windows. Once up the warped front steps, you'll find the door locked, but there are other ways in. Be warned, however, for no man is king here. And this home has no heart-- only spider webs and rotting plaster and the smell of "tears and vomit and blackness."<sup>2</sup> In fact, only one aphorism holds true for the Marsten house: there's no place like it.

Except, of course, as it is cousin to the dozens and dozens of haunted houses spawned in the dark imaginations of writers for hundreds of years. From Walpole's gothic Castle of Otranto to Poe's "Usher," Hawthorne's House of the Seven Gables, and King's Shining, the haunted house has established itself as an enduring motif in supernatural/psy-

chological literature for over two centuries. But what, exactly, is the source of its endurance? To be sure, the house is an archetype, a recurring, preconscious symbol associated with security on one level and with the human mind on another.<sup>3</sup> But that only partially explains its appeal. Ask any writer of the macabre why he uses the haunted house as a device and he'll answer, quite simply, that it's because the Bad Place is so effective at engendering fear. Home is a refuge, an escape, a place where underwear is the accepted attire and a beer and a cheeseburger an elegant repast. We expect our homes to be safe, comfortable, and most of all, ordered, and when, instead of Pledged surfaces and oiled hinges, we find cobwebs and creaking doors, emblems of disorder, we become obsessively uncomfortable. To find open, doors we left closed, to feel the presence of another person in a seemingly empty room is to find that the house that is an extension of us, our second skin, has suddenly grown a size too small. And that, insists Stephen King, is precisely what good horror is-- "a cold touch in the midst of the familiar. . . . When we go home and shoot the bolt on the door," he says, "we like to think we're locking the trouble out. The good horror story about the Bad Place whispers that we are not locking the world out; we are locking ourselves in . . . with them."<sup>4</sup>

In The Haunted Hotel that cold touch takes the form of a mummified human head that hovers in the air. In "The Beckoning Fair One," it is the sound of a woman--never seen-- brushing her hair. And in American Gothic it is the presence of trap doors and secret stairways and the



deft way in which the major character carves his lunch. The haunted house is a house askew, and askew in degrees ranging from the simple human evil seen in Bloch's novel to the actual supernatural visitations witnessed in The Ghost of Guir House to the subtle psychological sleights of hand we find in James' "The Jolly Corner." In the Bad Place may reside the traditional chain-rattling ghost, but not necessarily: the past is as much a spectre as any white-sheeted thing, and in a number of works emphasizing the haunted house as a motif, the disorder within is the result of some past action, generally violent, that lingers on. The traditional haunted house is nothing more than the prison of an earth-bound, essentially good spirit who has in some way been wronged and is bent, therefore, on alleviating its own suffering. The ghost may, as a sideline, demand proper burial or serve to warn of a catastrophe to come, but once he has wreaked revenge by exposing the villain responsible for his death, he disappears, presumably freed from Purgatory and allowed to enter Heaven Proper. Such is the case in Horace Walpole's Castle of Otranto and Clara Reeve's Old English Baron, as well as in a number of late nineteenth century ghost stories, though obviously, the haunted house as a repository for unexpiated sin continues to reappear even in the literature of this century.

Of course, like the chameleon, the haunted house was not content with a single color. It demanded several, fortunately, and in the years subsequent to Walpole's efforts donned many different hues. In Robert Marasco's Burnt Offerings (1973), the haunted house represents a gha-

ly microcosmic death/rebirth cycle in which human sacrifice is prerequisite to the house's own rejuvenation. In Charles Beale's The Ghost of Guir House (1897), the house, a tangle of ivy and worm-eaten wood, is a symbol of man's less-than-ideal existence on earth. The house represents the womb, a haven, in both James' The Turn of the Screw (1898) and Oliver Onions' "The Beckoning Fair One" (c. 1935), while in Algernon Blackwood's "The Other Wing" and James' "The Jolly Corner" (1909), it is synonymous with the human mind. Consistently, however, the haunted house has represented two things. On one hand, it may serve as a repository for unexpiated sin. On another, it may serve as a kind of psychological mirror capable of reflecting-- and often preying upon-- the obsessions of characters who reside within. Thus, it is not only the haunted house itself that is askew, but often the mind of the character who lives there. Hawthorne's Hepzibah, for example, is a withered spinster, the remnant of a gentility long faded; appropriately enough, her seven-gabled home houses webs and shadows and rotting wood. Similarly, the governess in The Turn of the Screw is a strait-laced, Victorian prude; in and around James' haunted house, therefore, materialize two characters with notorious sexual histories. Most often it is guilt that the haunted house reflects, but it may also be authoritarianism, sexual desire, or jealousy. Often, too, the haunted house as mirror may merge with one of the other interpretations. The house of Usher, for example, at once mirrors and magnifies the guilt and instability that form the core of Roderick Usher's anguish, and at the same time represents the incestuous



family whose sin requires expiation. Thus, haunting's two basic sources, unexpiated sin and the psychological mirror, are often as inseparable as subterranean passages from gothic castles. Both inspire that "cold touch in the midst of the familiar," though as will be seen, the latter's fingers are often the iciest.

Between the time that Walpole produced The Castle of Otranto and Stephen King The Shining, the haunted house has been subjected to a number of redecorative trends reflective of the times. The nineteenth century witnessed the development of psychological horror, the blurring of the distinction between good and evil, and the growing importance of the house as mirror. It witnessed the growth of mysticism and the use of the grotesque, as well as the beginning of the detective/horror novel made fashionable by Riddell and Collins. The twentieth century, too, would discern changes: the loss of the traditional gothic house as haunting site was one; the house as portal in the search for self was another. In fact, in regard to the Bad Place, but two things have remained constant: the haunted house has consistently represented unexpiated sin and mirrored psychological states. It is these constancies-- as well as the inconstancies-- in the development of the haunted house as literary motif that this thesis will attempt to trace.

Although it made an occasional appearance in Spenser and Shakespeare, the haunted house made no real debut until 1765. That year, Horace Walpole published The Castle of Otranto, a novel whose immediate

success was probably due more to a lack of sophistication on the reader's part than to any real artistry in Walpole's pen. H.P. Lovecraft called it "unconvincing and mediocre"<sup>5</sup> and lamented the fact that it falls so short of the "truly weird," but even he did not deny it its niche in literary history: as the first gothic novel, The Castle of Otranto exerted what Lovecraft called "an almost unparalleled influence" on literary trends, and if it is "tedious" and "melodramatic," it is also responsible for the genesis of a genre that is still finding popular acceptance two hundred years later. Walpole wrote his novel in the midst of a gothic revival, a revival that his Strawberry Hill, with its turrets and towers and corridors, had helped to generate; the romance took root in a nightmare, a dream the author had in June, 1764 involving an ancient castle ("a very natural dream for a head filled, like mine," Walpole wrote, "with Gothic story"<sup>6</sup>) and a giant hand in armor, a fitting genesis when we consider that the entire horror genre is a literature of dream, a medium through which the subconscious imagination, with its symbols and archetypes, expresses its fears and desires. Assuming the guise of translator and advertising the novel as a six hundred year old manuscript, Walpole produced a novel that assimilated the ancient and the modern romance, a novel that, in its bareness, its lack of description and digression, its five chapter construction and use of domestics for comic relief, is more like a play than an eighteenth century novel. The Castle of Otranto contains very little dialogue; Walpole's few lines are ineffective, as emotionless as his characters themselves,

characters who, while they nonetheless serve as prototypes for all haunted house inhabitants, are little more than wooden puppets: Manfred, the villain, a proud man obsessed with perpetuating his family's claim to Otranto; Hippolyta, his patient, obedient, milksop of a wife; Matilda, their nondescript daughter; Isabella, a character not kept particularly distinct from Matilda, a young woman intended to become Manfred's daughter-in-law until, when his son is suddenly killed, Manfred turns his own sexual attentions towards her; Theodore, the hero, a nobleman raised as a peasant, the true heir to Otranto whose arrival marks the beginning of Manfred's demise; and Otranto itself, the English cousin to Hawthorne's seven-gabled mansion and King's Overlook Hotel, a castle that, with its dark passageways and subterranean vaults, its ghosts and skeletons and flesh and blood villains, is at once the traditional gothic mainstay as well as the physical embodiment of the dark and twisted corridors of its owner's mind.

Neither character nor dialogue nor plot is responsible for the intrigue in Otranto, though where the latter is concerned, it should be noted that Walpole's plot, detailing the disintegration of a family, continues to reappear in haunted house novels of this century. Nor can its use of the supernatural be considered its strength: its giant armor, walking portrait, cowled skeleton, and bleeding statue (nose-bleeding, I should add) inspire laughter, not terror. But to say that The Castle of Otranto is deplete of terror simply isn't true, though to insist that Walpole understood the source of terror in his own novel would probably be equally false. It is in fact an early psychological novel.

Its eeriness lies not in gothic description or supernatural machinery; it lies, instead, in the sin-- incest, murder, usurpation-- that lingers in the castle unexpiated. It also lies in the effect of that sin on Manfred. For Manfred is a character askew, an authoritarian figure, a tyrant intent on controlling not only the most insignificant comings and goings in his castle but also the very lives of the people responsible to him. Similarly, he is a bit of a misogynist: his dislike for Matilda and Hippolyta is obvious; his desire for Isabella, ~~then~~, is primarily a desire for the perpetuation of his line, although a sexual motive cannot be ruled out. The possibility that Manfred is impotent, that it is he, not Hippolyta, who is to blame for his lack of an heir, may serve to explain both his misogyny and his authoritarianism, but it also serves to further bend a mind already buckled under with guilt. For despite his flaws, Manfred possesses a terrible need to repent. His sins include, on one hand, contemplating divorcing his wife and marrying Isabella, an act which, because of Isabella's identification with Matilda and the fact that she would have been his daughter-in-law had Conrad lived, can be considered incestuous; and on another, continuing to live in Otranto despite the fact that he knows his grandfather poisoned the rightful owner, Alfonso the Great, and usurped the claim for his own family. Of course, Manfred may attempt to conceal his guilt and insecurity by playing the villain, a role he simply isn't fit for. And perhaps, in another house, he might have succeeded. But not in the Castle of Otranto.



For not only does Manfred's home represent the unexpiated sin of his grandfather, it also exists as a psychological mirror capable of reflecting the guilt Manfred attempts to repress. Wherever he turns in his gothic castle, the personification of his tortured conscience, guilt greets him, and he can no more control it than he can the giant ghost of Alfonso whose armor appears, piece by piece, a harbinger of the revenge he intends to wreak: Manfred's only son is killed by the giant helmet that is the symbol of Alfonso's rightful claim to Otranto. The portrait of his grandfather sighs and winks-- and the plumes on the giant helmet wave-- each time Manfred contemplates entrenching his family further in sin by divorcing his wife or marrying Isabella. Theodore, the embodiment of Manfred's honor,<sup>7</sup> is imprisoned beneath the giant helmet, Manfred's way of repressing his own good intentions, but he escapes to confront the usurper once more. And, as Theodore is in fact Alfonso's grandson, his physical appearance alone is another turn of the screw as far as Manfred's conscience is concerned. Isabella, confined to the subterranean passageway that is, traditionally, the symbol of the subconscious, and specifically, the place where Manfred has attempted to submerge his sexual desires for the young lady, also escapes. Her presence serves to remind him that his affection for her is both unrequited and incestuous-- and thus, sinful-- while at the same time, her obvious dislike for him feeds his sexual insecurities and jealousies. Finally, however, Manfred can take no more. Realizing that his guilt is not to be repressed, he attempts to destroy it by murdering Isabella, at once symbolically consummating their relationship by run-



ning her through with a sword and terminating the guilt she serves as a reminder of. However, because of one of Fate's ironic meanderings, the woman he kills is not Isabella; it is, rather, his own daughter, Matilda, and in taking her life he has put an end to the very thing he was so intent on preserving, his own family line. And that, for a proud man like Manfred, is the hardest blow. His own villainous reserve destroyed, the castle that was at once his legacy of sin as well as the physical embodiment of his tortured conscience, shatters, for Otranto, like the ghost of Alfonso, has served its purpose: it has sent Manfred to his knees in penitence and confession. Expiation is, thus, complete, and the haunted house, as well as the haunted man, exists no more.

In the years following Walpole's efforts, Otranto was resurrected a number of times. In fact, Clara Reeve's Old English Baron is to be valued as much for what it borrows from its "literary offspring," The Castle of Otranto, as for the refinements it offered the genre. For while Reeve's intention was to write a novel that, like Walpole's, united the "most attractive and interesting circumstances of the ancient Romance and modern novel" and at the same time avoid what Reeve and most readers considered the Castle's failings, what she adds is little more than a great deal of overt didacticism on one hand (her novel was originally titled The Champion of Virtue, a Gothic Tale) and, more importantly, the concept of "credibility." According to Reeve, The Castle of Otranto "palls upon the mind"; Walpole's violent supernatural ma-

chinery was distracting rather than attracting. As Reeve says,

We can conceive, and allow of, the appearance of a ghost; we can even dispense with an enchanted sword and helmet; but then they must keep within certain limits of credibility: a sword so large as to require an hundred men to lift it; a helmet that by its own weight forces a passage through a court-yard into an arched vault, big enough for a man to go through; a picture that walks out of its frame; a skeleton ghost in a hermit's cowl:-- When your expectation is wound up to the highest pitch, these circumstances take it down with a witness [sic], destroy the work of imagination, and, instead of attention, excite laughter.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, Reeve's conception of probability is not ours; her disembodied groans and bloody suits of armor are, if of more normal size than Walpole's, just as fanciful. So that in effect, The Old English Baron does little more than perpetuate a trend. And yet, when we consider that without these early efforts the Poes and Stephen Kings of the world might never have been, it would be foolhardy to wish that Clara Reeve had never put pen to paper. And in fact, The Old English Baron is delightful-- charming, as Miss Austen would say-- a novel with a definite moral and a happy ending, and, in an era that brought us Pamela and Tom Jones, a total pagination of less than one hundred and fifty. It possesses all the necessary ingredients of a gothic romance: a usurping villain, a hero with a mistaken identity, and an ancient castle housing a wing haunted by virtuous ghosts seeking revenge. And if it is weakened by a plot that was just as old a hundred years earlier, it is strengthened by Reeve's knack for developing likeable characters and by her naive but refreshing insistence that the good

guys always win.

Like The Castle of Otranto, The Old English Baron is a skimpy little novel that, much to the chagrin of someone like Lovecraft, is not supernaturally captivating. The "truly weird" atmosphere is one that induces the willing suspension of disbelief; it causes us to shudder at the sight of Madeline Usher, her white robes streaked with blood, her fingers clawing at the door to her brother's room. But this atmosphere is dependent on description, description that Walpole and Reeve chose not to include. And where Walpole's novel deserves acclaim as an early psychological exploration, one in which the haunted castle represents the human psyche, Reeve's novel is decidedly less complex. Like Walpole, she uses the device of the lost manuscript, advertising The Old English Baron as a translation of an ancient work. She enlarges his cast, adding some secondary villains and heroes but retaining the character types traditional to the gothic romance. She borrows his medieval setting and his gothic castle and furnishes the latter with two ghosts, shades whose deaths were caused by the treachery of a relative intent on usurping their fortunes. But because the villain is kept in the background until the last few pages of the novel, there is no opportunity for Lovel Castle to take on the psychological complexity that Otranto does. Walter Lovel, the villain, has not even set foot in his castle for years, and though he has been beset by guilt and misfortune as a result of his sins, the castle itself is in no way responsible. He has not confessed his crimes or acknowledged the castle's

rightful heir, and the body of the murdered Lord Lovel still lies hidden beneath a closet flooring, but Walter Lovel has never lost sight of his own guilt; having lost the members of his family one by one as a result of what he sees as retribution, no gloomy castle can hide his sins. The result is that Reeve's castle represents unexpiated sin and that alone. Once Walter comes clean and settles his estate on its legitimate owner, and once the murdered spirits are given a proper burial, Good's triumph is complete. And The Old English Baron's castle, because it did not represent Walter Lovel and was not required to fall with him, therefore, remained intact, ready to inspire the next writer who decided that what literature needed was another novel about a haunted house.

That writer, of course, was Ann Radcliffe, a housewife who earned the reputation of being the best gothic novelist of her day via works like A Sicilian Romance, The Italian, and particularly, The Mysteries of Udolpho. According to legend, Mrs. Radcliffe began her writing career as a means of whiling away the hours until her husband came home-- but no matter the cause. The result was that someone finally effected a change on a genre begun thirty years earlier. For until Radcliffe, even writers who considered themselves reactionaries had done little more than imitate what Strawberry Hill's owner offered in The Castle of Otranto. And though her works exhibit the weaknesses typical of most sentimental novels, digressions, excessive description, the use of coincidence and stock characters, as a reformer of a genre that had lain



fallow since Walpole, Radcliffe earned even Lovecraft's praise for adding, as he says, "a genuine sense of the unearthly in scene and incident which closely approximated genius."<sup>10</sup> And in an era becoming used to statues with nosebleeds, Radcliffe's was no small contribution.

The Mysteries of Udolpho is Radcliffe's finest book, a unique achievement in terms of its author's ability to generate that atmosphere of awe and terror that her predecessors failed to, although it should be noted that she does so not through any real use of the supernatural but through description alone. The Mysteries of Udolpho is another novel that focuses on a family-- or the family if we consider Udolpho's inhabitants as character types evocative of all human nature. Udolpho's family is undergoing a fragmentation begun in The Castle of Otranto. Emily, the heroine, an imaginative and intolerably pure teenager, has lost both parents and is forced to reside with an aunt. Shortly after Emily's arrival, her aunt marries Signor Montoni, Udolpho's villain, a man who, intent on securing his new wife's fortunes for himself, carries both women off to his castle in the Apennines. It is there, in the castle of Udolpho, that Radcliffe puts her gothic imagination to use. Udolpho is first seen from a distance, "silent, lonely, and sublime," a majestic edifice so long as Emily remains unaware of what lies in store for her within. Closer up, however, the castle's own delapidation indicates that things are not what they seem. Montoni's home has, in places, rotted and fallen away, a manifestation of both its owners financial and his moral state. Inside, the castle is gloomy, cold, upstairs, a secret



passageway is hidden by an arras; below ground, a torture chamber is still intact. Strange knocks and voices are heard throughout the castle; a mysterious black veil covers an object so "horrible" as to make the delicate Emily swoon with fright. What's more, once Emily is rescued and taken to the Chateau-le-Blanc, even that home, while no Udolpho, reverberates with strange noises that emanate from what the servants insist is a haunted chamber.

There is, however, one small hitch: despite all the pains Radcliffe takes to arouse our apprehension, the only genuine ghost story in the entire novel is the one the servant Ludovico reads to himself as he spends the night in the chateau's "haunted" chamber<sup>11</sup>; for after creating that "truly weird" atmosphere, Radcliffe explains away seemingly supernatural incidents as natural occurrences. At Udolpho, disembodied voices come actually from a prisoner hiding in a secret passageway, and what appears to be a maggoty corpse behind the black veil is really a waxen image some stern priest designed as an object of penance. At the chateau, the bed with the black velvet pall conceals a hiding pirate, not an apparition<sup>12</sup>; and similarly, when Ludovico disappears from the "haunted" chamber, he has not been spirited away by ghosts-- he has been kidnapped by flesh and blood thieves.

But why would Radcliffe destroy, via her rational explanations, the very effect she sought to create? More than one critic has suggested that The Mysteries of Udolpho is, like Austen's Northanger Abbey, a reaction to the typical sentimental novel, an attempt to expose the

"extreme effects of sensibility."<sup>13</sup> To them, Emily St. Aubert is another Catherine Morland, a naive young woman whose imagination gets the best of her, and The Mysteries of Udolpho Radcliffe's way of at once evoking fear and terror and then exposing the rational explanations to show the weaknesses of the sensibility which had brought these emotions about in the first place.<sup>14</sup> But such an interpretation probably attributes to Mrs. Radcliffe more genius than she actually possessed. It is more likely that, carrying Clara Reeve's insistence on "credibility" a step further, Ann Radcliffe avoided the supernatural altogether rather than risk the laughter that a giant armored foot was likely to inspire.<sup>15</sup>

Still, the fact that there is no supernatural basis for The Mysteries of Udolpho does not preclude Mrs. Radcliffe's castles from being haunted, for in fact they are-- not by white-sheeted things, but by ghosts of a different sort. In the gothic novel, the ghost is an embodiment of sin, real, like the sin itself, but not tangible. In The Mysteries of Udolpho, Radcliffe simply chose to dispose of the ghost-vehicle and present the sin itself, as it is reflected by the castle of Udolpho and the Chateau-le-Blanc, and by the characters who are most closely associated with them. In this case, the sins, the ghosts, that haunt Radcliffe's castles are guilt and good old fashioned human evil. On one hand, the chateau has earned a sinister reputation for being the site of a murder: it was here that the Marquis de Villeroi, coerced by his lover, Laurentini, poisoned his wife. Villeroi himself is dead, but his accomplice lives, secluded in a convent not far from the Chateau.

Thus, like Otranto and Lovel, the Chateau-le-Blanc stands as a symbol of unexpiated sin, unexpiated until, near the end of the novel, Laurentini confesses and dies. Not uncoincidentally, Udolpho was once the nun's home; thus, with its decayed roofs and ramparts, it not only reflects Montoni's degenerated moral state, but Laurentini's as well.

Montoni is a bandit, not a monster, and though his harsh treatment of Emily's aunt leads to her death, he is not the diabolical character that Robert Bloch's Gordon Gregg is. He is an authoritarian figure, to be sure-- he has, like Udolpho itself, virtually engulfed the women he holds captive there-- and if Udolpho frowns defiance as it stands "sovereign of the scene," so does its owner. In order to win Emily's aunt, he assumes a facade, a facade seen symbolically as the repair work he has done to the castle in order to make it similarly presentable. But the interior of the castle, with its hidden passages and dungeon, mirrors Montoni's true nature. From ourselves we hide nothing, and Udolpho is, after all, Montoni.<sup>16</sup> Its mouldering stone walls surround his evil just as if they were the bones of his skull.

From The Mysteries of Udolpho to "The Fall of the House of Usher" is a quantum leap. In only a little over thirty years, writers began to exhibit a keen awareness of and interest in psychology; not uncoincidentally, good and evil became considerably less distinct in literature, and in works that used the haunted house at all, that particular motif became more central to the work, more of a character and less of

a literary device. Such is the case with Poe's short story, though it is not the case with some of the shorter supernatural novels that made their appearances toward the end of the century. "The Fall of the House of Usher" can be interpreted on two basic levels: as a ghost story in which two characters, Roderick Usher and the narrator, bury alive a third, Usher's sister Madeline; or as a psychological study of one character, again, Roderick, who has, under the stress of a horrible family sin, become schizophrenic. This particular interpretation insists that the narrator is merely a splinter of Usher's personality, the lighter side of an inherently dark nature, while Madeline, necessarily female, is the embodiment of his guilt. As it allows Usher house to usurp more of the limelight, it is this second interpretation that will form the basis of the discussion following.

If Ann Radcliffe's use of the supernatural "approximated" genius, then Edgar Allan Poe's equalled it, and Usher house itself, with its bleak walls and "eye-like" windows, can be offered in illustration. Unlike *Udolpho*, Usher is not sublime: it is hideous, unnerving, a mansion of gloom.—Surrounded by decayed trees and a "black and lurid" tarn, Usher's gruesomeness lies not in its own actual physical decay but at least partially in the unwholesome atmosphere that surrounds it, an atmosphere that "had no affinity with the air of heaven. . . a pestilent and mystic vapour, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued."<sup>17</sup> Of course, such a nasty physical world could not exist of its own accord, and it is possible that just as the house Usher lives in mirrors the



blackness of its owner's mind, so does the world beyond the house. At any rate, the morbid atmosphere found in "The Fall of the House of Usher" is not caused by "vegetable sentience"; it is caused, instead, by a mind "from which darkness, as if an inherent positive quality, poured forth upon all objects of the moral and physical universe, in one unceasing radiation of gloom."<sup>18</sup>

"In the minds of the peasantry who used it," Poe's narrator tells us, the "House of Usher" is an "appellation which seemed to include. . . both the family and the family mansion."<sup>19</sup> And to an extent not yet seen in works employing the haunted house, Usher the house is Usher the man. It at once echoes the gloom his dark mind pours forth and animates the guilt responsible for that gloom. There is a reason for the fact that while the house as a whole looks intact, its individual stones are in reality crumbling and a barely perceptible fissure seen zig-zagging across its stone walls: the Usher family line appears similarly intact at first glance, despite the fact the Madeline and Roderick are its only representatives. Nothing is whole or sane in the House of Usher. The fissure that runs across its walls runs similarly across Roderick Usher's mind; his near-insanity is made evident in his manic depression, his morbid acuteness of the senses, and in his nervous agitation, none of which is caused, as he insists, by an inherited sensitivity. It is caused, instead, by guilt, the source of which Usher euphemistically calls a "family evil." This particular malady, for which Usher despairs to find a remedy, is incest.



That the house of Usher is a house perpetuated on incest is deducible for several reasons. One is Roderick's emphasis on the fact that he and Madeline are the last of the family line; another is the nervousness and acuteness of senses, obvious manifestations of guilt, that he possesses; a third is the burial of the still-alive Madeline, for though he insists that placing his sister in the house vault is a precaution in case she is alive, he screws the coffin lid shut and locks the iron door, thereby preventing the escape of a woman he is at once sexually attracted to and morally repulsed by; finally is his insistence that whatever is wrong with him is a family evil. No wonder, then, that Usher's stones are crumbling and its walls surrounded by the sulphurous stench of the tarn; it is a house built on sin, a sin that both the house and the world outside of it mirror. It is also a sin that Usher is trying to avoid by, for one thing, poisoning his sister<sup>20</sup> and thereby thwarting an incestuous consummation, and by summoning the narrator to his aid. Roderick and the narrator are not separate characters, but that does not necessarily mean that the latter is not real. He is certainly real to Usher, who is, after all, telling the story, if in the narrator's guise. Roderick is schizophrenic, a character with two distinct personalities, one dark, one light. His life and his sanity depend on the re-integration of these opposite halves, and in "summoning" the narrator, he is actually taking a step toward that re-integration. In a sense, then, "The Fall of the House of Usher" is a story of rehabilitation, and what Roderick Usher seeks to be cured of is the black nature that his guilt over the "family sin" has created, a nature that

the house he lives in reflects.

In the course of rehabilitation Usher learns that his guilt and his incestuous desires are not repressable; they must be destroyed. We rarely see Madeline except, once or twice, gliding through a dark hallway like an apparition, a nightmare, but from Roderick's mind she is never absent. It is she, so he thinks, who is responsible for his mental torment, and if poisons fail, he'll find another way to be rid of her. His painting of the subterranean vault, a vault bathed in what the narrator calls a "ghastly and inappropriate splendour," supplies the answer: he'll bury her alive. The light that seems so misplaced in the painting, thus, is indicative of the salvation Usher hopes the vault, and his sister's death, will bring him. That vault, the physical equivalent of his subconscious mind; the place where all unpleasant things are submerged, will be the site of the expiation of the Usher sin. Or at least, it should have been. Instead, Madeline escapes from her prison. And with each scrape of her nails against the coffin lid, the vault door, she lives to torment him just a little longer. It is not until the doors to Usher's chamber open their "ponderous and ebony jaws" and Madeline enters that we understand why repression was so ineffective: it is necessary for both Roderick and the narrator to come face to face with the embodiment of the guilt Usher's dark side had experienced for so long. For if Roderick is obsessed with the family sin, the narrator is oblivious to it, and it is necessary for both halves of Usher's personality to acknowledge that sin before re-integration can occur. "The

"Fall of the House of Usher" is in the end, thus, a psychological fairy tale. Usher the man is no longer askew, no longer obsessed with his own morbid nature. And though like Otranto, Usher shatters, all that is destroyed is the house that, as a legacy of the Usher family sin, had stood to torture its owner's conscience. For Roderick-Narrator-Usher lives.

The most important house novel of the nineteenth century is, like "The Fall of the House of Usher," not a supernatural tale. In The House of the Seven Gables there is not even a scrap of a ghost, though to be sure, there lives in it a woman who could easily pass as a witch. But Hepzibah is flesh and blood and if the spinster seems withered and grim, it is the Pyncheon house that is to blame, not a magic cauldron. For the seven-gabled house is not a particularly healthy environment, either morally or physically. Surrounded by a ramshackle fence in a yard overrun with burdocks, Hawthorne's creation is a dreary dungeon filled with tattered furniture and moth-eaten drapes. Its timbers plagued with dry-rot, its roof so damp that moss grows there, the Pyncheon house is a mausoleum, not a home, but it is the only home that Hepzibah, a shrunken shadow of a woman whose own decrepitude reflects a parallel waning of the Pyncheon mansion's own glory, has ever known.

Hawthorne's seven-gabled mansion encompasses both of the traditional interpretations, functioning at once as house as unexpiated sin and as house as mirror. In fact, where the former is concerned, at least one writer has insisted that the reason Hawthorne gave his gothic house

seven gables was so that the figure would be equal to the number of deadly sins.<sup>21</sup> The Pyncheon house, like Manfred's Otranto, is a house built on injustice. Colonel Pyncheon, the mansion's original owner, usurped the very land the house was built on from a cottager named Maule, though, in the process, he earned a well-deserved curse: God, insisted Maule, would give the Colonel blood to drink. And in fact, the elder Pyncheon was discovered in the library one day, choked to death on his own blood. But Maule, despite the fact that he was hanged as a witch, was not to blame: Pyncheon died from an inherited malady, nothing more. His death, thus, was not an act of revenge. And while Maule may have planted a "heavy footstep" on the conscience of every Pyncheon who ever set foot in that house, not one of them ever lifted a finger to make restitution to Maule's heirs. Instead, the portrait of the man who represented the cornerstone of the Pyncheon family sin, a portrait so "intimately connected with the fate of the house. . . that, if once it should be removed, that very instant, the whole edifice would come thundering down,"<sup>22</sup> was left hanging. The Colonel's descendants were too naive, it seems, to understand that they would have been far better off had they pulled the portrait down and let the house built over an "unquiet grave" tumble to its death.

Thus the past, says Holgrave, the young daguerrotypist who rents one of Hepzibah's gables, continued to lie upon the present like a "giant's dead body." Not only was the Colonel's sin allowed to go unexpiated but subsequent Pyncheons continued to reside in a house that



had become a symbol of moral and political degeneracy. For in Hawthorne's novel, the Colonel's sin lay not merely in the theft of Maule's land; it lay also in his upholding of a social structure that allowed the aristocracy to tyrannize the lower classes. Thus to Holgrave, Maule's only surviving heir, a pre-socialist with ardent democratic ideals, the Pyncheon house represents the aristocratic abuse of power: Pyncheon had appropriated a poor man's land and had been able to retain it because of the existence of a legal/political structure that favored the moneyed classes. The Pyncheon house (i.e., an undemocratic government) is thus an unwholesome place to live, and with its "grime and sordidness, which are the crystallization on its walls the human breath [sic] that has been drawn and exhaled. . . in discontent and anguish,"<sup>23</sup> ought to be purified with fire-- "purified till only its ashes remain!" And with that exclamation, even Clifford agrees: "What we call real estate-- the solid ground to build a house on--," he says, "is the broad foundation on which nearly all the guilt of this world rests. . . . A man will commit almost any wrong-- he will heap up an immense pile of wickedness, as hard as granite, and which will weigh as heavily upon his soul, to eternal ages-- only to build a great, gloomy, dark-chambered mansion, for himself to die in, and for his posterity to be miserable in."<sup>24</sup>

It is unfortunate for the Pyncheon family that, decades after the Colonel's death, another Pyncheon intent on heaping up his own pile of wickedness should darken the pages of the Pyncheon family photo album, but Judge Pyncheon is, nonetheless, the Colonel's reincarnation. Not



only has he inherited his ancestor's physical appearance; as the prototype of a new generation of Pyncheons, the Judge also shares all of the Colonel's weaknesses and ~~bad~~ passions. For though he may have earned the town's respect via his cultivated benignity, the Judge is in fact a ruthless man who has doubled the Pyncheon sin by usurping the claim to the Pyncheon fortune and by allowing his cousin Clifford to spend thirty years in prison for a crime he did not commit. Thus, the gloom and decay that haunt the seven-gabled house reflect not merely the Colonel's moral degeneration, but the Judge's as well. However, these are not the only characters who find their psyches mirrored in the gothic mansion. Both Hepzibah and Clifford know that the Pyncheon mansion is an "encircling dungeon" that has come to stand for their "dismal and haunted hearts,"<sup>25</sup> but for Clifford especially, it is even more than a dungeon: it is death itself. Hawthorne constantly emphasizes the house's humanness, its "meditative look," its "human countenance"; Clifford, more than anyone else, takes him at his word. For him, the house is the Judge, and living within its confines a constant reminder of the youth he has lost, of the years the Judge has taken from him. At one point, he even attempts to jump out of a window into the midst of a political procession that passes, for it, with its bright colors and its swarm of human bodies, represents life. The jump would have made him another man, he insists, and in an ironic way, it would have-- it would have made him a dead man, but then perhaps real death is the only escape from the living death the Pyncheon house represents.

Where Hepzibah is concerned, the house takes on a slightly different interpretation. While guilty of no real sin, Hepzibah is guilty of clinging to a gentility no longer in keeping with either the times or her financial status. All her "deeply cherished and ridiculous consciousness of long descent" really means is that she can play the harpsichord and dance the minuet-- or at least she could, thirty years ago. And though she does "lower" herself by opening a penny shop in the back of the house in order to earn her living, she finds it horribly degrading. Social status, it seems, is one of those Pyncheon family traditions that "lingered like cobwebs and incrustations of smoke, about the rooms and chimney-corners of the House of the Seven Gables."<sup>26</sup> And yet, this false sense of status is at least partially responsible for the Pyncheon family's moral decline. Had Hepzibah but taken a good look around her, she would have seen that her house, with its unkempt lawn and dusty rooms, simply mirrored the old woman she had become; in order to rid the place, as well as herself, of some of the gloom, she had to accept the fact that she was no better and no better off than the grubby children who came to the shop for penny gingerbread. Such an awareness is precisely what makes Phoebe, another Pyncheon kin, the easy-going, light-hearted young lady that she is. Having no social pretensions to begin with, she is not averse to doling out tea and licorice in her cousin Hepzibah's shop. Her motives are utilitarian, and where working meant eating-- well, there was an end to it. Her unaffected nature, her "youthful, fresh, and thoroughly wholesome heart"

all combined to vanish the grime and sordidness of the House of the Seven Gables. The house as mirror can, after all, reflect sunshine as well as gloom.

As is traditional, Hawthorne's House of the Seven Gables is, by the end of the novel, no longer askew. The elements that have combined to haunt it, the conglomeration of Pyncheon sins equatable to the Seven Deadly Sins, are ultimately expiated. The Judge is the Colonel's reincarnation; his death is thus the expiation of the sins of both. It is also the means by which the Pyncheon mansion's gloom-- and with it the mental gloom that Hepzibah and Clifford experience-- is alleviated. The house is no longer a symbol of degeneration; it is, instead, a symbol of rebirth, for even as the Judge sits dead in the library, Holgrave and Phoebe, characters representative of an unfettered, democratic idealism, declare their love for each other. And it is this love, rather than the fire that the daguerrotypist had earlier suggested, that succeeds in purifying the House of the Seven Gables. And while Clifford may insist that the "greatest possible stumbling blocks in the path of human happiness and improvement, are those heaps of bricks, and stones. . . which men painfully contrive for their own torment, and call them house and home,"<sup>27</sup> the Pyncheon house has in fact served a necessary purpose. It represents, says Clark Griffith, half of the moral balance. To live in the House of the Seven Gables is to learn humility and charity; it is to learn the essential fact that "sin is at once indestructible and the true basis for brotherhood."<sup>28</sup> Hepzibah and Clifford err, however, in entirely secluding themselves in the mansion, for to "dwell exclusively among the foul

shadows of human depravity" Griffith insists, "is to behold only their dark ugliness, never their power for ennobling."<sup>29</sup> He continues:

To pass into the house is necessary; yet the human heart decays when it lingers there. To pass out of the house is necessary; yet the heart is hardened when it abandons those inmost meanings which the house contains. But to pass into and through and then out of the house, as Phoebe and Holgrave and Hepzibah and Clifford ultimately do-- herein lies the correct moral balance and, therefore, the way toward redemption. It is to see the Pyncheon's blackest weeds blossom into the flowers of Eden. It is to hear a strong note of joy struck on Alice Pyncheon's dusky harpsichord. Above all. . . it is to seize upon the wisdom that true reality and the truly compassionate heart are neither entirely substance nor entirely shadow but an inextricable compound of them both.

In The House of the Seven Gables and "The Fall of the House of Usher," the haunted house assumes an importance that it would forfeit again in the short supernatural novels that flourished in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. But to Poe and Hawthorne the haunted house was as integral as Colonel Pyncheon's portrait was to the seven-gabled house, and without it, neither the short story nor the novel could succeed. Of course, this is not to say that works that employ the house as a character are superior to those that use it only as an incidental device; it is to say that the house-oriented novel is more psychologically complex. Undoubtedly, that complexity has some bearing on the association between house and mind, an association not especially prevalent in Walpole and Radcliffe. At any rate, the more psychological the work, the more intimately the house reflects the human psyche, as



is the case with "Usher" and The House of the Seven Gables. In the short novels that frequented Victorian Christmas annuals during the latter part of the century, however, the inverse is true. Mrs. Riddell, the best known of a slew of Victorian ghost storyists, was a writer, not a psychologist; the two novels examined here along with Wilkie Collins' The Haunted Hotel are gems as glimpses of middle-class Victorian society, but their ghosts are as unsophisticated as Clara Reeve's.

The Haunted House at Latchford appeared in 1873, two years before The Uninhabited House, six years before The Haunted Hotel. All three combine romance and the supernatural with the detective motif popularized by Dickens; each is multi-plotted, with at least one of the plot strands involving a male character who, skeptical of the supernatural, attempts to explain away deathly smells, eerie sounds, and ghostly manifestations as natural phenomena. Particularly where characterization is concerned, all three exhibit the advancements in literary technique typical of the times; in regard to the haunted house, however, Riddell and Collins took a giant step backwards and toppled, headfirst, into the Castle of Otranto. In The Uninhabited House, for example, we are given an untenable Bad Place haunted by a ghost who lingers at the scene of his own violent death. Its ghost, like Otranto's or Lovel's, simply wants revenge, which he gets, ultimately, by scaring his murderer to death. In The Haunted House at Latchford we have the shade of another murdered victim, this time a woman, and perhaps as is fitting for her sex, it is not revenge she wants; instead, besides a proper



burial for herself, she seeks to secure her heirs' fortunes by delivering to them jewels that have been walled up with her inside Crow Hall. Finally, in The Haunted Hotel, we see a Venetian villa, the scene of a Lord Montbarry's murder, turned into a fashionable hotel. No ghost per se haunts Collins' hotel, but no member of the Montbarry family has succeeded in spending the night there. And while this novel does delve just a little deeper into the psychological than Riddell's do-- the novel's Baron-turned-mad-scientist, for example, finds his own evil nature mimicked by the hotel's "lower regions," the sulphurous dungeon that houses his laboratory-- its Bad Place is just another repository for unexpiated sin.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century saw dozens and dozens of ghost stories like Riddell's and Collins', stories in which the haunted house's role was minimal, stories in which the Good Guys always won and the fairytale ending culminated in a marriage. But with at least two novels of the same time period, Charles Willing Beale's The Ghost of Guir House and Vernon Lee's A Phantom Lover, the Bad Place assumes a role that is as integral as it is untraditional. Vernon Lee was the pen-name of Violet Paget; A Phantom Lover was her first supernatural work, a work that, in its use of the dramatic monologue is reminiscent of Browning, while in its subtlety and ambiguity it anticipates James. It is essentially the story of three-- perhaps four-- characters brought together in an English manor house: the narrator, an artist commissioned to do a portrait of his hosts; William Oke, a rather ordinary ruddy-faced

man intensely in love with his wife; and Alice Oke, an eccentric young woman who lives for the past. Lurking in the shadows, the fourth character, Lovelock, was a seventeenth century poet. Whether or not he is substance or shadow is difficult to say, but it is Lovelock who is the underlying force in the novel, the current that carries it toward its own gory climax.

Okehurst is of red brick, a "forlorn, vast place" surrounded by a filled-in moat. Inside, the manor house is a perfectly preserved tribute to the seventeenth century, flowers perched on tabletops representing the only modern infiltrations. It is established from the beginning, however, that something is askew in Okehurst. Everything looks "natural, spontaneous," and indeed it should: down to the clock that chimes the "faint silvery tunes of forgotten days," the furnishings in Okehurst are well over two hundred years old, and yet, they show not a scratch, not a hint of age. It is as if in Okehurst, time has stood still for two centuries, refusing even the dust wont to settle in corners, refusing to allow the past that it symbolizes to die.

Okehurst, thus, is a fitting environment for Alice Oke, a strange, exotic woman who is not, as the narrator says, a "body," a woman who has no interest in the present, only an "eccentric passion in the past."<sup>31</sup> Alice dresses in seventeenth century garb; the recurring glimpse we are given of her, in fact, is as she reclines in her white robes in a seventeenth century armchair, her mind on the period of time, and the man, that she has grown so obsessed by. The mirror image of an Alice Oke

who lived in 1626, the present Alice, bored by her country life and her common husband, spends her waking hours daydreaming of her look-alike ancestor and her affair with the poet Lovelock, an affair that ended, once Alice's husband found out, in the poet's death. As a result of her fantasies, another Alice Oke finds herself "locked" in love with the poet to the extent that, as the narrator tells us, she passes over her own husband's very existence.

Alice is a narcissist and Okehurst her reflective pool. In it she sees nothing but herself and Lovelock. In her yellow drawing room she has set up a shrine to him: his miniature is kept there on display, his poems secreted in a drawer. It is here that she wants the narrator to paint her portrait, here in the room that represents her core, her obsession with the past. To her husband William, however, the room is inextricably linked with Lovelock, the phantom lover who has stolen his wife. And where for Alice, Okehurst is a private womb symbolic of her narcissism, for William it is a lens that has seized hold of his jealousy and proceeded to magnify and distort it. To feed her own ego, Alice deliberately provokes her husband by harping on Lovelock; it is no wonder, then, that William, grown intensely suspicious of a wife whose unapproachable distance has kept them childless, begins to hear Lovelock in the drive, to see him creeping round the house. He finally becomes so obsessed that, leading the narrator into the yellow room in order to "see something," he insists that he has found Lovelock and his wife together. To save his wife's reputation, he feels it is his

duty to dispose of Lovelock, and so he fires. But of course, the poet was never there. William Oke has become Okehurst's victim, his jealousy magnified, his rival manifested in a house that was his wife's ally, not his. Alice dies in the yellow room, at once a victim of her obsession and a victor reunited with her lover of centuries ago. And William, who had all along found Okehurst too large for the "two" of them, finds it grown even larger, his Alice farther from his grasp than she had ever been.

Beale's Guir House is another novel that turned away from the mainstream; its haunted house represents neither unexpiated sin nor mirrored psychological states. For Guir House is askew, but in an entirely different sense: Beale chose to steep his house in theosophy rather than tradition, though to be sure, he maintained the gothic elements made popular a hundred years earlier. Paul Henley is Beale's major character, a bachelor-adventurer who accepts an invitation to visit Guir House from a woman he has never met. His journey, however, is not a simple one: following the haunted house tradition, Guir is situated in a remote part of the state, far from any railway stations, and far from any other habitations; this physical distance thus replaces the distance in time that so often prompted the use of the medieval setting. Henley is met by a woman dressed in the costume of a century earlier, a woman who leaves him, when the cart's axle is about to break, while he learns from a Negro traveler of Guir House's unsavory reputation. But Henley continues his journey, and, once past the mountain ridges and



the tunnels of cedars and spruces and ivy, he comes face to face with Dorothy Guir's home:

It was built of black stones, rough as when dug from the ground more than a century before. At the farther end was a tower with an open belfry, choked in a tangle of vines and bushes, within which the bell was dimly visible through a crust of spiders' webs and birds' nests. Patches of moss and vegetable mold relieved the blackness of the stones, and a venerable ivy plant clung like a rotten fish-net to the wall. It was a weird, yet fascinating picture; for the house, like a rocky cliff, looked as if it had grown where it stood. Parts of the building were crumbling, and decay had laid its hand more or less heavily upon the greater part of the structure. All this in the yellow light of the moon, and under the peculiar circumstances, made a scene which was deeply impressive.<sup>32</sup>

Inside Guir House, Henley finds oak beams and antique furniture and portraits with crumbling frames, all conducive to the creation of an atmosphere he calls "barbaric, eccentric, artistic." Like the traditional haunted house, its passageways are dark and devious; in a scene reminiscent of Jane Austen's gothic satire, Northanger Abbey, Henley finds one of the mainstays of the gothic romance: in his bedroom closet is a hidden entrance to a stairway. At the bottom of it stands a bolted door; beyond that, a brick wall. Like Catherine Morland or Emily St. Aubert, Henley, too, finds his nosiness getting the better of him, and he actually succeeds in unbricking the wall. What he finds, fortunately, is worth more than a hundred black-veiled wax corpses, for in the "vault-like" chamber with its "damp, mouldy, and foul atmosphere," four por-



traits on rotted canvasses, portraits "buried forever from the sight of human eyes," encircle a mound of cloth and human bone. On the countenance of each portrait is depicted not "torture alone, for horror, fright, and mental agony were strangely blended in each."<sup>33</sup> But the master stroke of terror, that cold touch in the midst of the familiar, lies in the fact that one of those portraits-- and two hundred and six of the bones-- belongs to Dorothy Guir.

The Guirs, it turns out, have no affinity with flesh and blood whatsoever. A hundred years earlier, Ah Ben's wife and three daughters were slaughtered by Indians in the hidden room beneath Henley's chamber. And when Ah Ben returned and found them, he bricked up the doorway and slit his own wrist. Too late, he decided that he wanted to live, but the mortar between the bricks had already hardened. Ah Ben died, thus, only to haunt the site of his suicide. He is, however, no ordinary ghost. As he tells it,

When a man dies dominated by some intense earthly desire, his mind is barred against the higher powers and greater possibilities of spirit. . . . he perceives and hopes for nothing save the continuance of that life which has so completely filled his nature. His old environment overpowers the new by the very force of his will and if this continues, he becomes not only a haunting spirit, but a materialized one, visible to certain people under certain conditions, and compelled to live out his life amid the scenes which had so attracted him. This, Mr. Henley, has been my case. I shall live upon earth, and be visible to the spiritually susceptible, until the strong impression made at the hour of death shall have worn away.<sup>34</sup>

It is also the case of his daughter, Dorothy, however, for just as

Ah Ben's own desire kept him from entirely entering the spirit world, so did it catch Dorothy in its web, pulling her back into the material world. Henley, however, can free Dorothy by marrying her. And this, furthermore, is precisely the reason that he was invited to Guir House in the first place.

Only in the sense that both Ah Ben and Dorothy deny the laws of Karma by remaining in this world does Guir House represent unexpiated sin. Similarly, though it does not mirror the mind in any traditional sense, Beale's haunted house does reflect the Guirs' loss of a spiritual existence. For the house that Henley thinks he sees is only an illusion, a hallucination that Ah Ben engenders in order to make his guest feel at home. Of the real Guir House nothing remains but crumbling stones and ivy; the pictures, the fireplace, the very floor have disintegrated in the hundred years since the Guirs died; only the secret chamber remains intact. Guir House, then, represents human existence on earth, an existence whose perfection is illusionary and second-rate, as is indicated both by the true state of disrepair Guir House has fallen to and, in comparison, by the spiritual city of Levachan, an ideal metropolis in which total happiness reigns. Earthly, physical existence is no more ideal, Beale tells us, than the real Guir House. The spiritual life, on the other hand, a life that Levachan is the embodiment of, is ideal; it is, as Ah Ben says, "real life," a life that the Guirs, earth-bound in the dungeon of physical existence that is

Guir House, will never know.

The Jamesian spirit in "The Ghostly Rental," on the other hand, is considerably more fortunate. And while James may have earned a reputation as a master of psychological ambiguity, like Beale he could also write a fairly "earthly" ghost story. "The Ghostly Rental," for example, is a supernatural tale-- with a Jamesian twist, of course-- that we would more likely attribute to a Mrs. Riddell or to an early Algernon Blackwood. Its narrator is a divinity student who stumbles across a deserted house he absolutely knows is haunted. As it turns out, however, his "spiritually blighted" house is merely the site of an elaborate hoax. Years earlier, a Captain Diamond had there surprised his daughter with a lover; his angry words, so the legend went, killed her. His penance, it seems, is to return to the house each quarter to collect the rent from his daughter's shade, a ritual he finds horribly unpleasant as both the house and the ghost that is "anywhere, everywhere," serve as reminders of his guilt. This particular ghost is not, however, the white, transparent thing the narrator had anticipated; it is, instead, "a thing of thick shadows, densely opaque."<sup>35</sup> Diamond's daughter is not, in fact, dead at all; she has simply been plaguing her father's conscience and, at the same time, winning his good will: the only way he could forgive his promiscuous daughter, she says, is if he thought her dead.

"The Ghostly Rental's" house, thus, stands as a repository for

unexpiated sin, the daughter's sin. But the hoax ends with a delightful irony that puts an edge to the dulled, traditional explanation: just as the narrator meets the "ghost" of Diamond's daughter, Diamond himself dies and appears in spectral form to inject a little terror into the daughter who had kept him in thrall for so long. He stays only long enough, however, to see the Ghostly Rental burned to the ground in recognition of his release.

Slightly more sophisticated than "The Ghostly Rental," "Owen Wingrave" is another Jamesian supernatural tale. Its Bad Place, reminiscent of Hawthorne's House of the Seven Gables, is one of the earliest innately evil haunted houses. Paramore is the family seat to which young Owen Wingrave, a conscientious rebel who refuses to make the army his career, is sent for "therapeutic" purposes: it is hoped that the family, as well as the house that stands as a symbol of a long line of illustrious military careers, will rout Owen's peculiar notions for good. A shabby Jacobean mansion that Owen calls "uncanny," "wicked and weird," Paramore is, as he sees it, out to get him for his breach of family tradition. But where the House of the Seven Gables was able to envelop Hepzibah and Clifford in its gloomy shroud, to steep them in its own family tradition (the Colonel's sin), Owen refuses to be thus affected by Paramore. He will forfeit his inheritance rather than pursue a career he finds morally objectionable, the loss of his patrimony being the least of his worries. What does worry him is the house. Like



most haunted houses, Paramore has an unsavory reputation. In it a Wingrave had inadvertantly killed his own son and been found dead himself in the burial chamber the next day; the flaw that he was guilty of-- a tyrannical temper and an inclination to violence-- has, thus, been absorbed by the house that has been the residence of a number of Wingraves whose similar temperaments have made them suited to military life. But Owen is not of them, and the house, because like Usher it is the family whose breaths have crystallized on its walls for centuries, is Owen's enemy. The ancestral portraits that line Paramore's walls glower and mutter at him, calling him "dreadful things," as they sit, "ever so grimly, in judgement."<sup>36</sup> But Owen is determined not to allow the house that has sensed and magnified his fear of it to defeat him. To prove his courage, he spends the night in the haunted burial chamber; he is found the next morning, dead. For despite his own intentions, Owen Wingrave had indeed become a soldier. His enemy, however, was not some foreign host: it was Paramore itself, the embodiment of an authoritarianism that would not allow dissent, that served, at once, as battle, battleground, and victor in vengeance.

By the time James wrote The Turn of the Screw in 1898, his work had begun to exhibit a psychological complexity that was not seen in "The Ghostly Rental" and had only been briefly glimpsed in "Owen Wingrave," a complexity that is probably more assumed by its critics than intended by James, who called his novelette a "simple" ghost story. James insisted that Miss Jessel and Quint were "real" ghosts; his



Freudian critics, however, insist that they are merely "projections resulting from sexual desire and frustration,"<sup>37</sup> and indeed, such an interpretation gains a validity that James himself did not grant it when we consider that no one, save the governess, even sees the ghosts. For our purposes, of course, whether or not James' spectres are real is not as important as the nature of their relationship to Bly, the house where the narrator/governess has taken employment. Bly is an idyllic, fairytale estate that the governess sees as a fortress against the encroachment of moral decay that she, a provincial young woman whose father is a parson, is determined to protect her charges from; that determination, fed by the romantic notions she entertains on the children's uncle's behalf, manifests itself in her unconscious intention to be the perfect mother to Flora and Miles, a position whose duties include preserving the children's innocence. Bly is thus a womb; the governess's charges, as she constantly reminds us, are cherubs, angels. Her life at Bly, consequently, is incredibly dull-- that is, so long as her position as "Protectress of the Innocent" goes unchallenged. Luckily, the idyll is threatened when Miles is dismissed from a private school. We can only guess the circumstances, but it would appear that the child has an intimate knowledge of four-letter words, a knowledge absorbed from Quint, Bly's former and now deceased caretaker. This, of course, is sufficient to fire the governess with a Victorian version of the Moral Majority's righteous outrage, but it is not the only threat she faces: her haven is being infiltrated, it seems, by the ghost

of Quint, a man who, having gotten the former governess, Miss Jessel, pregnant, exists in her mind as a symbol of moral degeneracy; his presence indicates, at least to the governess, that Miles' and Flora's home is a repository for unexpiated sin. The governess considers it her duty to protect the children from sexual knowledge, though, as Elizabeth MacAndrew points out, she is "unconsciously libidinous" in describing her relationship with Miles and Flora.<sup>38</sup> She is not capable of repressing her own sexual longings, it seems, a fact James makes evident by his subtle identification of Quint's animal nature with the governess's own: each time the young woman looks out through a window that should have reflected her own face, it instead shows Quint's. Nor is she capable of voicing sexual fears: Quint's and Jessel's improprieties are referred to only as "horrors," lest the children's delicate psyches be permanently scarred.

Gradually Quint, a decidedly physical being who serves as grist for the governess's sexual release and kindling for her fears of moral degeneracy, begins to invade the sanctuary at Bly, an indication that the governess's home functions as a psychological mirror. What Bly mirrors, via Quint, is the sexual knowledge and desire that the governess attempts to repress. Paralleling the invasion of Bly is the infiltration of sexual knowledge into the minds of Miles and Flora. Bly, thus, can be seen as the embodiment of the innocent psyche's gradual attainment of what the governess considers improper, adult knowledge. What should be simple facts of life are turned by her into horrendous

secrets that the children are terrified to admit any knowledge of. No one but the governess sees the ghosts because no one but she makes the unfortunate identification between them and the moral/sexual degeneration she insists they represent. Her determination to make the children see her point of view-- i.e., that sexuality is base, disgusting--turns Flora, who hasn't the slightest inkling of what she's getting at, against her. And though ultimately, Miles, a much maturer fellow than his sister, does make the connection, does admit to "seeing" Quint, his acquiescence to the governess's point of view marks the death not of him but of his innocence. His idyllic sojourn at Bly, thus, comes to an unhappy end, an end made unhappy not so much by Miles' "growing up" as by his acceptance of a set of beliefs that are totally erroneous. Consequently, Bly, as a reflection of the boy's mind, is more askew at the end of the novel than it was at the beginning.

The Turn of the Screw lies midway in the Jamesian canon, halfway between "The Ghostly Rental" and its traditional ha'nts and "The Jolly Corner," a wholly psychological tale of one man's search for his alter ego. Spencer Brydon is an expatriot of sorts, an American who has just returned from spending thirty-three years of his life in Europe; awaiting him is the house on the "jolly corner," the one in which he had "first seen the light," a home that, due to a series of family deaths that have left him its sole inheritor, is now "all his." Because James establishes an identification between Brydon-the-house and Brydon-the-man from the outset, however, we know that it is not simply the family

home that is "all his": so, similarly, is his mind all his-- there are no more Brydons left to make a claim on him, and Spencer is at fifty-six more his own man than he has ever been. He is free to "crape about" his house at midnight or to pursue the business and architectural interests that he discovers he has a knack for. It is this discovery, in fact, that prompts his search for his alter ego, the "small tight bud" that might have blossomed into a hardnosed entrepreneur had he not "blighted" it by going abroad. And what better place to search for it than in the house that would have been its American habitat, its honing ground.

Alice Staverton's insistence that Spencer had "neglected a real gift" become for Brydon hypnotic codewords, mantras that induce in him a heightened consciousness that allows him to play out his eccentric fantasy, his search for his "other self." His prowls through the house on the jolly corner, thus, whether real or not, are simply devices, literal embodiments of a search that is psychological rather than physical. And, as Brydon has always been a man of the mind rather than, like his alter ego, a man of the body, this narcissistic dip into the Brydon pools of self is a great deal more refreshing for him than anything so tedious as actual social interaction. Spencer Brydon is not interested in the world "out there"; he is his only concern. Thus, for him, the "real, the waiting life" exists only in his mind and begins-- as beguilingly as the slow opening bars of some music follows the tap of the conductor's wand"<sup>39</sup>-- only when he hears behind him the click of



the door in the house on the jolly corner.

Brydon goes most often to the house at dusk, the tranquil, twilight hours, a fitting time, it seems, for a meditational experience. He likes the house, he says, for its "reaches of communication," for its passageways and doors, a compliment that can be simultaneously applied to Brydon himself: it implies that he considers himself a logical, objective thinker-- in other words, there are no obstacles (locked doors, etc.) to impede his mental processes. Or at least, so Brydon thinks. His progress through the house parallels the various stages of consciousness that must be passed through before the inner self, the very thing little Tim in Algernon Blackwood's "The Other Wing" finds behind the green baize door, can be reached. It grows darker as he sinks deeper into himself, seen literally as his movement away from the front door, away from the windows that allow the infiltration of the world beyond, as if to approximate the jungle conditions where one usually stalks such a formidable opponent as Spencer's alter ego; the darkness also, obviously, is meant to indicate Spencer's movements into the unexplored regions of his own mind. It is in the upper level of the house, appropriately enough, an area seen symbolically as heightened consciousness, that Brydon assumes he has at last brought his other half to bay. At the moment of truth, however, James' egoist discovers that he has overestimated his own prowess. Not only does his alter ego elude him, but he is brought face to face, in his home of traditionally open reaches of communication, with a closed



door, a door that, because of its unexpected existence, terrifies Brydon, sending him to open a window in order to break the spell. Though not, of course, before he has rationalized his cowardice in not opening the door as "discretion." "Rest forever," he calls to the alter ego he thinks stands on the other side, "and let me!"<sup>40</sup>

But Brydon's alter ego is as adept a master of the sleight of hand as James was: he is not behind that door. He lies waiting, instead, in the open front doorway to which he knows Brydon will retreat. Brydon's alter ego knows his "other half," it seems, far better than Spencer does, and he is determined to confront him with the character flaw Brydon is too self-centered to admit to. It is no coincidence that Brydon's home is a "great gaunt shell" where "absolute vacancy reigned." Its owner is similarly empty. Others have criticized him for wasting his life in a surrender to sensations, an accurate evaluation, it appears, of a hedonistic narcissist who barely acknowledges the existence-- not to mention worth-- of other people. Further more, unlike his alter ego, Spencer Brydon has accomplished absolutely nothing in his life. And if he rationalizes his refusal to let the house on the jolly corner as an indication that there are "values other than the beastly rent-values," what we see is Spencer Brydon asserting his superiority over his other half, the grizzle-haired ghost whose silk lappet and gold watch-guard fail to disguise the ruthless power he exudes. In fact, it is the alter ego who is superior. He, too, has

learned that there are "values other than the beastly rent-values," but he also knows that these "other values" are not the self-indulgent fripperies that have constituted Spencer's fifty-six years of life. And this, of course, is where the closed door's importance lies. Beyond it lies the realization the alter ego knew that Spencer could not come to of his own accord and would, rather, leave unexplored. Downstairs, however, the alter ego has opened the front door and allowed that realization to deluge the house on the jolly corner. For while Spencer Brydon could not, looking at himself, see that there was something missing, he could see that lack in his alter ego. The ghost that haunts Spencer Brydon, the sin that lies unexpiated in the Brydon house, is nothing more than his own inability to love, an inability that his empty house symbolizes. He may insist that the house is lived in, is furnished, but all that lives in and furnishes his house is his own childhood memories and childish regard for self. Allowing Alice Staverton inside the front door-- that is, inside himself, inside his very heart-- is his first step toward loving someone other than himself, his first step toward exorcising the egoist who haunts the house on the jolly corner.

Only to a small extent does the house in "The Jolly Corner" admit to traditional interpretation: Brydon's narcissism can be considered a lingering unexpiated sin and the house a psychological mirror in the sense that its own emptiness reflects Brydon's similar spiritual state. But for the most part, James primary consideration was to

equate the house on the jolly corner with its owner's mind. Thus, Brydon's house is atypical; it is rather than stands for. Of one of the twentieth century's earliest offerings, Algernon Blackwood's "The Empty House," the opposite is true. Despite a couple of innovations that anticipate Stephen King, "The Empty House" is a very ordinary tale of the exploration of a house with an unsavory reputation. The explorers, a spinster aunt who is something of a psychical researcher, and the nephew she drags along, find nothing unusual about the exterior of house number thirteen. It is neither "lonely nor unkempt," they notice, and looks rather like the fifty identical houses in the neighborhood, a fact which distinguishes Blackwood's house from the average Bad Place whose outward delapidation signals the existence of something askew within. However, Blackwood was aware of something that Shirley Jackson would dwell on in The Haunting of Hill House: appearances can be deceiving. As Shorthouse tells us,

Certain houses, like certain persons, manage somehow to proclaim at once their character for evil. In the case of the latter, no particular feature need betray them; they may boast an open countenance and an ingenuous smile; and yet a little of their company leaves the unalterable conviction that there is something radically amiss with their being: that they are evil.

And perhaps, with houses the same principle is operative. . . . 41

And indeed it is. For despite what number thirteen looks like on the outside, inside it is a veritable ghostly playground teeming with the

sights and sounds typical of the Bad Place. Though no one but Short-house and his aunt is in the house, doors shut of themselves, coughing sounds are heard, and a candlewick is ground out, as it grows nearer to midnight, the ghosts of an angry man and a terrified woman are seen; and as the "witching hour" strikes, the Empty House reaches its eerie climax, replaying the events responsible for the haunting: the explorers feel and hear a frenzied chase taking place along the stairway. Eventually, they hear what sounds like a body being thrown over the bannister and to the floor below.

Blackwood's notions of what it takes to inspire terror are obviously not ours; we are no more terrified of his ghostly chase scene than we were of Alfonso's giant armored foot. In other respects, however, Blackwood was an innovator. He was one of the first supernaturalists to employ the concept of the "physical medium": at least one of his Empty House characters, he suggests, serves to "focus the forces of a haunted house already charged to the brim," an idea King later used in The Shining in respect to Danny Torrance, another "medium" whose presence is as volatile as if he were "walking with unprotected lamps among uncovered stores of gunpowder."<sup>42</sup> Blackwood also introduced the notion of the psychic battery, a concept that, because King resurrected it as well, will be explored in greater detail later, but which can be summarized as the ability of the Bad Place to absorb and store violence spent there, a notion akin to the idea of the haunted house as repository of unexpiated sin. And this, of course, is



precisely what the Empty House is: several years earlier, a jealous stableman threw his lover over the bannister and to her death on the floor below; it is this "aroma of evil deeds committed under a particular roof, long after the actual doers have passed away" that is responsible for the horror Shorthouse and his aunt experience on setting foot in the Bad Place. "Something of the original passion of the evil-doer, and of the horror felt by his victim," Blackwood says, lingers in the house that functions as a psychic battery, so that the "innocent watcher," his skin creeping, his blood chilled, becomes "terror-stricken without apparent cause."<sup>43</sup>

"The Empty House" fails, it seems, in regard to this last notion, for while Blackwood's characters may be "terror-stricken without apparent cause," we require a little more prompting, prompting that Blackwood does give us in "The Other Wing," though to be sure, it is not terror that Tim's Nightmare Corridor inspires-- it is simple enchantment. "The Other Wing" is a masterpiece of delight, a Golden Book version of "The Jolly Corner." In it, nine year old Tim replaces Spencer Brydon as protagonist, and a deserted wing in his parents' home becomes his jolly-cornered house. His quest, however, is the same as Brydon's, for though Tim himself is not aware of it, what he seeks in the Other Wing is his inner self.

Technically, of course, Tim's quest begins in his own bedroom. It starts one night when he becomes aware that someone is peeking round the corner to look in on him just as he is on the verge of sleep,

someone who combines the "lightness and the silence of a shadow" but is not, Tim insists, a shadow. This someone lingers in his room, moving his curtains, poking the fire, and, once he is asleep, she brings her "little ones" into the room to join in the vigil with her. He can feel that she is kindly, protective, and so he accepts his mother's indulgent brush-off: his visitor, she tells him, is sleep; the "little ones" are her accompanying dreams. What she is, however, is not as important as where she comes from. He knows that it must be from somewhere beyond the house, the roof or the sky, he guesses, though finally deciding that the Other Wing, part of the house long closed off and housing only silence, dust, and shadows, is undoubtedly her home. And it is there that he intends to seek her.

Like Spencer Brydon's, Tim's search is psychological rather than physical. Too young to understand concepts of subconscious and heightened consciousness and inner self, he explains his mental journey in terms of its physical equivalents. The Other Wing is real, of course, but not to Tim: he has never seen it, cannot even discover a way into it. And yet, one afternoon after invading his father's study, spinning in his swivel chair, and day-dreaming about the ivory-handled cane that belonged to his great-grandfather, Tim suddenly finds himself face to face with a green baize door. "How it happened exactly," Tim has no idea; we, on the other hand, know precisely what's going on. In fact, Tim never leaves the study: the spinning chair and comfortable surroundings lull him into a sort of semi-trance; the process

of sinking deeper into himself he equates with actual physical movement. To us, the green baize door is a symbolic entrance into a deepened consciousness; to Tim, the green baize door is a green baize door. And yet, beyond it lies a section of the house he's never seen but knows, nonetheless. "The corridor was as familiar to him," he says, "as the floor of his own bedroom. . . . Though he had never, to the best of his knowledge entered it before, he knew with intimacy its every detail."<sup>44</sup>

The fact that Tim has an intimate knowledge of a place he's never seen is not the only indication that the Other Wing is not really another wing at all but, rather, Tim's own nine year old mind. The green baize door closed behind him, he enters a world that defies natural law; in it he walks on air. Similarly, a "diffused and gentle light that seemed like the silver on the lawn when a half-moon sails a cloudless sky,"<sup>45</sup> is not what we would expect in a window-less, years-deserted wing. And while we can assume that such an atmosphere is part and parcel of a meditational experience, it also bears an eerie resemblance to descriptions of the next world, descriptions supplied by people who, at one point technically dead, have somehow been revived. Even the structure of the Other Wing points to its being psychological rather than physical: when Tim, intent on returning the cane that was his great-grandfather's prized possession, passes through the green baize door, he is confronted by what he calls the Nightmare Passage. Closed doors line the corridor; behind them, "nightmares"

scratch to get out. At one point, one of the nightmares grabs Tim's cane, an indication that the nightmare is in "full swing." Tim sees the cane become part of his hand and, flattened by the door so that it looks like a bulrush, the cane actually becomes a bulrush. The surreal sequence ends once Tim sees Sleep in the passageway ahead of him, but not before Blackwood has seen to it that we grasp his intention: the Nightmare Passage represents the subconscious mind; behind each doorway lies the stuff that bad dreams are made of, dreams released in the surrender of sleep that Tim's inviting tap on the door represents.

Sleep, says Tim, is so tall that she melts into the sky; she is soft, tender, her feathered wings enfolding tiny points of light. She is his protectress, and in her care he has absolutely nothing to fear, not even from the Nightmare Passage. But Sleep, of course, is only a symbol for a psychological state that exists beyond the subconscious. Even Tim knows this: he connects her, he says, with "deep thoughts of his own, the deepest of all."<sup>46</sup> It is no wonder that he catches only fleeting glimpses of her at night: she only begins to make herself known, to "take possession," as he surrenders himself, in sleep, to her control. Sleep is, in a sense, Tim's alter ego, his other half, an imaginary playmate who will not make an appearance, he tells us, once his bedroom-sharing brother comes home from school, a playmate who has become an increasingly important part of his life in his brother's absence and in the approach of a terribly signifi-



cant point of Tim's life: he, too, is about to be sent away to a private school. His father is busy with rents and taxes; his mother knits and reads and cares for Tim's baby sister. He is, thus, very much alone, and in his loneliness, he has turned to himself for companionship. "'Good night, Master Tim, and happy dreams,'" he says to himself each night, hoping to assuage that loneliness, a loneliness that engenders fantasies of travelling to the moon and the stars and the bottom of the sea, adventures that can begin for Tim only on the other side of the green baize door.

Thus, in Blackwood's "The Other Wing," unexpiated sin and the psychological mirror are not given roles at all. House is mind just as it was in "The Jolly Corner," and the ghost that haunts the Other Wing is Tim's inner self, a spirit brought to life in response to Tim's loneliness; this loneliness, in turn, is responsible for Tim's "house" being askew in the first place. However, Blackwood's tale is not solely psychological: there is a supernatural element in it that cannot be explained, cannot be brushed off as the product of a child's imagination. Tim insists that Sleep escorts him to his great-grandfather's chamber, a room furnished with thick tapestries and an open fireplace. There, he returns the ivory-handled cane to its rightful owner, and in exchange, the great-grandfather promises to repay the child for his kindness. And one night, years later, when Tim is grown and living with his own family, his great-grandfather's ghost keeps his word, stepping into his room to warn him that the house

is in flames. It is not until then that Tim remembers a detail long since forgotten: the cane he claimed to have delivered to his great-grandfather was never seen again. And Tim, says Blackwood, though questioned very closely concerning it, swore with all his might that he had not the smallest notion where it was. Which was, of course, the truth."<sup>47</sup>

Still, while "The Other Wing" does admit to a real ghost whose goal, like that of many a traditional spirit, is to warn of an impending catastrophe, it is primarily a psychological tale whose house represents the human psyche. And while such an identification became more and more prevalent in a century devoted to Freud and Jung, supernaturalists never lost sight of the haunted house's traditional interpretations. In "The Beckoning Fair One," for example, a tale written by Oliver Onions, a compatriot of Blackwood's, the house is at once The Turn of the Screw's haven and A Phantom Lover's psychological mirror. A simple red brick affair, the house stands in a run-down neighborhood, but the floor Paul Oleron rents becomes to him a thing a beauty, a sanctuary. Oleron is a middle-aged writer on the brink of making or breaking his career. In the middle of his maybe-masterpiece, a novel called Romilly Bishop, a series of inconveniences prompt him to move into the flat that becomes for him an obsession, a temporary obsession, he insists, but one that nonetheless becomes so absorbing that he accomplishes absolutely nothing else. All of which, for a man who has had "twenty years of garrets and roof-chambers and dingy flats

and shabby lodgings,"<sup>48</sup> is understandable: Paul Oleron has simply reached the point in his life where dinginess and shabbiness are no longer desirable or even adequate. He needs a change of scenery, a place to rest; his new home, thus, made cozy and comfortable by a collection of inherited furnishings, becomes for Paul Oleron a rehabilitative retreat.

Its effect on Paul is not, however, particularly positive. His new home acts as a magnet, drawing from him his creative energies; rather than write, he spends his time enhancing his little nest. Yet in all fairness to the house, it is not, as Owen Wingrave's was, out to get Oleron. It merely mirrors and reflects the discontent that has been smouldering in Paul for years, a discontent that his friend Elsie senses and fears. An intimate friend, Elsie knows Paul, knows that his "reward" is as far off as ever, knows too that he has begun to care less and less about his writing career. "To tell a man at the point of exhaustion that only another effort is required of him" is all "very well," she says. But Paul is as "far off as ever."<sup>49</sup> And while he may see his new home as an escape from such pressure, she sees it as a threat. Not only has it provided an excuse for an extensive hiatus as far as his novel is concerned; because of the excessively feminine nature of the flat and its furnishings, a nature purposely antithetical to Elsie and her fictional counterpart, Romilly, Paul finds an excuse for his growing dislike of both women: they lack femininity. His major character he intends to obliterate with a candle flame; his

"moistly pink" friend who constantly nags him about the flagging state of his career-- and this, of course, is the real source of his dislike for her-- becomes "out of place" in his apartment. So much so, in fact, that peculiar accidents befall her each time she sets foot there: she is cut on a nail that Paul was certain he had extracted; she falls through a step that had never so much as trembled beneath Paul's weight. But it is not the house that doesn't want Elsie there: it is Paul. And while henchmen are typically human, in "The Beckoning Fair One" roles are reversed: the discontent Paul experiences is reflected by a house that succeeds where its owner fails in actively demonstrating resentment.

Or that, at least, is as it seems to Paul, though to be sure, his judgement grows less and less reliable, his house and the mind it mirrors more askew, the longer he stays in the flat. Not only does his home allow him an escape from professional pressures and an outlet for suppressed aggression; it also provides him, in a bizarre sort of way, with a lover. Having rejected the only two women in his life, Paul is now terribly alone. His elder-flower white woodwork can provide only so much solace. Thus, in his mind and in the house that is a reflection of his mind, he engenders his own phantom lover, his "Beckoning Fair One," a feminine spirit whose presence is indicated by the sweep and crackle of a comb through hair. Paul never sees this woman; his association with her is limited to his insistence that he can hear her combing her hair and that, at one point, he can actually see, suspended



in air, the comb she uses. Because we never see her, however, we can assume that she is only a figment of his imagination created in response to the discontent and pressures he suffers from. But it is almost as if the house, sensing his need for companionship and sensing, too, that his companion should bear no resemblance to Elsie, extracts from air a feminine coquette and presents her to Paul Oleron as a gift. What Paul fails to see is that the Beckoning Fair One is a gift that should have been approached as cautiously as any red-ribboned box whose nametag read "Pandora."

The house that had initially been Pauls' womb, his refuge from an unsatisfying, demanding career, becomes, by the end of the story, a house of horrors. Where decorating his home had been rehabilitative, soothing to a mind on the verge of mental collapse, allowing his house/mind to conjure up an imaginary playmate destroys his sanity. In his obsession, Oleron, like Roderick Usher, becomes extremely sensitive to noise and light; he neither eats nor leaves his apartment but spends his time fretting and weeping. He assumes that he needs no one, and he keeps Elsie, the ghost of his professional career, out of his house just as he attempts to keep her out of his mind; for as a constant reminder that he isn't living up to his potential, Elsie's presence is salt in the wound. Neither attempt, of course, succeeds: Oleron can no more keep Elsie away than James' governess could Quint. She simply refuses to be "suppressed," and at the peak of his insanity, Oleron murders her. His "house," it seems, has played a terrible trick on him,

for just as Clifford and Hepzibah erred in totally secluding themselves in the House of the Seven Gables, so does Oleron err in thinking it necessary to similarly seclude himself. His mind already struggling to maintain its sanity, the physical and psychological isolation he subjects himself to carry him into the chasm. Thus, while to Paul Oleron Onions' Bad Place served as womb and psychic mirror, to a future renter it may represent unexpiated sin, its ghost a woman found murdered in a kitchen cupboard and looking more like a large, lumpy pudding than a "moistly pink" lady journalist.

In "The Beckoning Fair One" Onions' Bad Place reflects its major character's insanity but certainly isn't responsible for it, and while a similar case is seen in both A Phantom Lover and A Turn of the Screw, one of the foremost supernaturalists of the twentieth century, H.P. Lovecraft, found such a formula decidedly inadequate. It was not that he rejected the haunted house's traditional interpretations, for as will be seen, his own Bad Places were often symbols of mirrored psyches and unexpiated sin. And while he did in fact reverse Onions' formula, presenting houses that drive their inhabitants mad and not vice versa, his major concern lay more with the severity of the sin to be expiated, the severity of the character flaw to be reflected. To Lovecraft, the professional pressures Oleron suffers under would not be just cause for insanity any more than a single murder would be cause for a haunting. Thus, in his own prose, monumental forces are at work, and if a sin or a psyche is not on a par with Jack the Ripper's, it doesn't de-

serve attention.

Lovecraft was an innovator, one of the first supernaturalists for decades to steer away from traditional ghouls and goblins. Instead of witches and vampires, one group of Lovecraftian demons are "unnamables," horrors that defy natural law and exist instead as multi-eyed, tentacled blobs with anthropomorphic faces. The "unnamables" are not mutants; rather, they are innately evil life forms that pre-date human existence. As such, both they and the houses they live in defy typical categorization. For while an unnamable's haunting place generally is a dark, delapidated gothic home, a creature that is innately evil cannot sin; a creature that is not human has no psyche to mirror. In Lovecraft, consequently, the haunted house acquired a new interpretation: it is, as we learn in "The Shunned House," a "symbol of all that is utterly hideous."<sup>50</sup>

Thus, universal hideousness joined the third world ranks of womb and mind and earthly existence. As a theme, it makes its debut in a number of Lovecraftian shorts, among them "The Dunwich Horror," "The Unnamable," and "The Shunned House." Each is, simply, the story of a person or persons' attempt to exorcise the "thing" using its Bad Place as a base of operations. In the latter story, the Bad Place is a traditional dormered and gabled antique with a nasty reputation: dozens have died there as a result of a mysterious anemia. And while no one regards the house as "haunted," the community's naivete is apparent in the chosen epithet, "unlucky." We know that the Shunned House sits in the center of a gothic landscape.

in the midst of a graveyard, a fact that would account for the hauntings in a 1982 novel, Poltergeist, but the unfortunate location seems to have no bearing here. It is not inhabited by a Montoni in a 1930's suit; no relatives' bones lie hidden in a secret passageway. But there is something askew in the Shunned House, and whatever it is, it seems to emanate from the basement, a foul dungeon filled with rotted furniture and phosphorescent fungi, and it is here that the narrator begins his vigil. What he encounters defies explanation: it is a "vaporous corpse-light, yellow and diseased, which bubbled and lapped to a gigantic height in vague outlines half human and half monstrous. . . . It was all eyes-- wolfish and mocking-- and the rugose-like head dissolved at the top to a thin stream of mist."<sup>51</sup> Obviously, Lovecraft's haunter is one of the unnamables, an oozing mass of prehistoric horror; and the Shunned House its womb, its mirror, its disguise, and, by association, the embodiment of all that is truly awful.

In other stories Lovecraft discarded the notion of house as universal hideousness in favor of its more traditional interpretations. In "The Lurking Fear," for instance, the Martense House, reminiscent of Usher, possesses an outward physical delapidation that reflects the moral and physical degeneration of the family whose name it bears. The Martenses' sin is even the same as the Ushers', though not to any comparable degree. Driven underground by a horrible fear of lightning, the Martenses begin a process of inbreeding that culminates in regressed evolution. No longer human, the ape-like creatures with im-



mense fangs are driven to frenzy by electrical storms. Radiating outward from the family seat, they massacre and devour the countryfolk in surrounding areas. And, as they are too degenerate to see to the expiation of the incestuous sin begun by their ancestors, the narrator expiates it for them, destroying the burrows and the ramshackle mansion that stood like an obscene totem over the Martenses' evil spawning ground.

The discovery of a horrible family sin is also the focus of "The Rats in the Walls," a story whose Exham Priory was the site of a mass murder during the reign of James I. Walter de la Poer's slaughter of his own family is not, however, the source of the evil that lingers in the Priory unexpiated, for in fact, the peasantry lauded his efforts, considering him a hero. The true source of Exham's unsavory reputation its current owner/renovator must discover, and he does, eventually, the scratches and scurryings of rats inside Exham's walls leading to the discovery of an underground grotto that the narrator, a relative of the de la Poers, calls an "antechamber of hell." This grotto closely parallels de la Poer's subconscious mind; in it lies the secret of his ancestors' sin, a sin that had been buried as effectively beneath Exham Priory as it was in its current owner's mind. Uncovering the entrance to the grotto leads to the discovery of what Lovecraft would call "unutterable hideousness": the de la Poers, it seems, had feasted on human and semi-human flesh as part of an ancient Roman rite; the grotto floor, consequently, is a veritable graveyard, a tangle of bones

picked clean by rats that have themselves been dead for centuries. The rats that the narrator-- and only the narrator-- hears are spectres symbolic of the de la Poer sin, haunters that grate on de la Poer's memory and trigger the recovery of a genetically transmitted family consciousness. Exham Priory is, thus, at once a monument to evil and a facade, a decoy; its gothic exterior earns it an air of culture and civilization that it isn't worthy of, for in fact, its foundation dates from Druidic times, a period more in keeping with the paganistic cannibals it actually housed. And while technically, expiation should have been complete once Walter de la Poer murdered the members of his family responsible for the ghastly ritual, the fact that the rats still haunt it, that the peasants still fear it, indicates that Exham Priory is yet askew. And as one of the narrator's excavating buddies learns, so is Exham's new master. The sight of the twilit grotto piled high with bones triggers the inherited de la Poer evil, and in a fit of madness, the narrator devours his friend. As the last of his own cannibalistic line, however, his death will insure complete expiation-- and the rats in the walls will rest at last.

To Lovecraft and the majority of the supernaturalists who preceded him, the haunted house was a haven for sins of various kinds, be they sins of character-- i.e., narcissism, provinciality, jealousy, etc.-- or the more tangible sins of the flesh, murder and incest being the most prevalent examples. The Bad Place might reflect these flaws in character and flesh, but it was in no way responsible for them; it

acted, rather, like a funhouse mirror, often magnifying the image held before it, but never creating that image. At least, such was the case until Shirley Jackson decided to do a little innovating of her own. Jackson was one of the earliest supernaturalists to insist that the Bad Place was more than just an innocent bystander.<sup>52</sup> It might mirror human foibles, but it could also create them; it might act as a repository for unexpiated sin, but it could also instigate that sin. And that, of course, is the case in Jackson's own novel, The Haunting of Hill House.

Subterranean waters, electric currents, hallucinations caused by polluted air have absolutely nothing to do with the peculiar goings on in Hill House, nothing to do with the several deaths that have occurred inside its walls, nothing to do with the fact that the fence surrounding it is "locked and doublelocked and chained and barred." For despite the fact that in Hill House "walls continued upright, bricks met neatly, floors were firm, and doors were sensibly shut,"<sup>53</sup> Jackson's Bad Place is as insane as any gothic heap of boards and bricks. There is no barely perceptible fissure zigzagging across its walls, but Hill House is as askew as Usher was. Every angle is slightly wrong; every stair uneven. Knobs turn and doors shut of themselves. Temperatures drop to unaccountable lows. But no person, living or dead, is responsible for the haunting of Hill House. It is simply and unaccountably innately evil. As Jackson tells us:

No human eye can isolate the unhappy coincidence of line and place which suggests evil in the face of a

house, and yet somehow, a maniac juxtaposition, a badly turned angle, some chance meeting of roof and sky, turned Hill House into a place of despair, more frightening because the face of Hill House seemed awake, with a watchfulness from the blank windows and a touch of glee in the eyebrow of a cornice. Almost any house, caught unexpectedly or at an odd angle, can turn a deeply humorous look on a watching person; even a mischievous little chimney, or a dormer like a dimple, can catch up a beholder with a sense of fellowship; but a house arrogant and hating, never off guard, can only be evil. This house, which seemed somehow to have formed itself, flying together into its own powerful pattern under the hands of its builders, fitting itself into its own construction of lines and angles, reared its great head back against the sky without concession to humanity. It was a house without kindness, never meant to be lived in, not a fit place for people or for love or for hope. Exorcism cannot alter the countenance of a house; Hill House would stand as it was until it was destroyed.<sup>54</sup>

That Hill House's original owner and builder, Hugh Crain, was less than sane is indisputable. The house's odd angles, the narrator insists, suited his less-than-sensible, less-than-squared-away mind; his legacy to his young daughters, we learn, was a home-made version of the ten commandments, illustrated with horrifyingly graphic prints and signed in blood. But Hill House is not simply a psychological mirror reflective of the tortured windings of its owner's mind: the evil begins before he sets foot there, killing his wife, leaving him with two young daughters to raise. Similarly, while its last inhabitant hanged herself from the turret on the library tower, no restless shade is responsible for smearing Theodora's clothing with blood or for gripping Eleanor's hand in the middle of the night. Hill House is



simply and literally a bad place; Dr. Montague's insistence that while there is an impressive list of tragedies connected with the house, people have to "live and die somewhere," is not, therefore, particularly reassuring; it becomes even less so when we hear from the same speaker that Hill House is definitely evil, a place of "contained ill will" that enchains and destroys its inhabitants. Its methods are subtle: it seeks out existing flaws and weaknesses in character and proceeds to prey upon them; it is not, however, the traditional psychological mirror we've seen dozens of times before. For Hill House is an active agent of evil, not a passive agent of good; it intends to destroy innocent lives, not to expose the sins of the guilty. Eleanor, its current victim, is a case in point.

Eleanor despises Hill House the moment she sees it. It is vile, diseased; it makes her feel like "a small creature swallowed whole by a monster."<sup>55</sup> The caretaker warns her that she'll be sorry she made him unlock the gate's double padlocks and Theodora, a psychic Hill House guest, insists she should leave. But Eleanor is, for one thing, headstrong. She is also escaping an unpleasant family situation and asserting a newly-found independence. At thirty-four, Eleanor has never left home, though in a sense, she's never really had a home, living first with her mother until that woman's death, and then with a sister and her husband. Hill House is, thus, Eleanor's first adventure; it is also her first quest for home and love. These are the things the house senses and preys upon, and despite the fact that Eleanor

abhorr's Hill House at first glance, she soon grows very comfortable there-- and no wonder. Sensing her need for home and love, Hill House becomes both of these. It courts her, soothes her. The words "Help Eleanor come home" appear on its hall paneling, signalling the beginning of a familiarity and a friendship and feeding Eleanor's vanity: the house has singled her out; it knows her name. Similarly, when Eleanor finds herself outshone by Theodora, the house takes vengeance for her, smearing her rival's closetful of clothes with blood. And, during one particularly violent display of haunting, Eleanor takes comfort in holding the hand of the person next to her. As it turns out, however, no "person" was there-- Hill House was itself comforting her.

Eleanor is childish and narcissistic but she is not stupid. She remains suspicious of Hill House's advances, refusing to accept it as home and lover even though a part of her insists that Hugh Crain's mansion might permanently assuage the loneliness that is her greatest fear. But as time passes, she feels herself "dissolve and slip and separate." The part of her that desires consummation with Hill House becomes "helpless and frantic and driven." Eventually, her only wish is to surrender, which she does one night as an enraged Hill House seems to lift itself off its foundation, tumbling furniture, breaking glass. But like the volcanoes of legend, once the virgin had been sacrificed, Hill House, too, silences its tantrum once Eleanor agrees to offer herself. And while surrender leads to a oneness Eleanor finds blissful, referring to the house as "we," suddenly knowing its every curve and corner, it also nearly causes her to fall to her death from the library's narrow iron stairway. Consequently, Dr. Montague sends

her packing, despite her insistence that the house wants her to stay, that she likes it, which is, the doctor tells her, precisely why she must go. But the thought that had been running through Eleanor's mind from the moment she embarked on her adventure ultimately does come true: her journey does end in lovers meeting, though in a momentary return of sanity just before her car crashes into a tree, Eleanor sees that Hill House has beguiled her and that she has accepted a demon for a lover.

Hill House may have been one of the first innately evil Bad Places, but it certainly wasn't the last, as the Allardyce House in Robert Marasco's Burnt Offerings shows. But Allardyce differs from Hill in one important respect: Jackson's Bad Place was malevolent simply for the sake of being so; Marasco's is necessarily evil: its very being is dependent on the expenditure of human life. What we see in Burnt Offerings, consequently, is a ghastly death/rebirth cycle, and because the Allardyce House is a house askew, people must die in order for a house to live.

The house the Rolfes stumble into in their search for a vacation home away from the city is certainly delapidated, but its delapidation is not reflective of some human moral degeneration within. Instead, everything is "busted," as the handyman says, for a reason that Marian Rolfe will not discover until it is too late: Allardyce House has simply reached the lowest curve in its virtually human life cycle; its greenhouse and garden will remain plant graveyards, its massive mansion a nest of dust and disarray, until the "right people" bring "some kind of life" back to it. Miss Allardyce speaks tongue-in-cheek when she

tells the Rolfes that "it can take a heck of a lot of people to make a house this size come alive,"<sup>56</sup> but she speaks the gospel truth. And though her renters miss the point of her "joke" for some time, they are not unaware that Allardyce is not completely sane; after a while, they begin to wonder if they are. For like many of its predecessors, Allardyce, too, acts like an immense mirror, a magnet that draws out the worst in its inhabitants or, like Lovecraft's Shunned House, a magnifying lens that enlarges physical and mental weaknesses. Ben Rolfe, for instance, had begun losing his car in city parking lots, and he harbors, consequently, a terrible unconscious fear of going insane. Allardyce House, sensing that fear, barrages him with visions of a chauffeur-driven hearse that nearly convinces him that it is he, and not the house, that is askew. In the case of Ben's Aunt Elizabeth, it is age that Allardyce preys on, turning a normally vivacious and attractive seventy-four year old into a woman too weak to climb stairs, too tired to get out of bed. However, Ben and Elizabeth have something to be thankful for: Allardyce House destroys them, but it does so quickly. Marian Rolfe is not so fortunate.

~~Marian becomes Allardyce's~~ victim, but it is some time before she is aware of this fact. Rather, like Hill House's Eleanor, she enjoys the attention the house pays to her, and in return, she pampers it. For the house, having seized upon Marian's weaknesses, has proceeded to take advantage of them: if she has an obsession with cleanliness, Al-



lardyce will bequeath to her room after dusty room in which to vent her Hughesian tendencies; if she has an obsession with expensive objects, it will present her Chippendales and Sheratons and closets bursting with gold and silver goblets and trays. In the process of entertaining her, however, it is also using her, alienating her from her family, making her an accomplice in their deaths. This process of disintegration begins almost immediately: Ben has no intention of renting the house, offering the ridiculously low price as evidence that things are not what they should be; his wife, however, perhaps sensing Allardyce's ability to fulfill her obsessions, throws a tantrum that lands her family smack in the middle of a nightmare. For acquiescing to his wife's wishes, Ben's reward is losing her to an immense house that demands constant polishing and pampering. And soon, Allardyce not only fills her days but her nights as well: made self-conscious by the presence of the house, Marian begins to rebuff her husband's sexual advances, as if the house were capable of sensing and being hurt by any display of Marian's affection directed to anyone but itself.

Midway through Burnt Offerings we begin to understand the significance of the handyman's statement that "'what you see here is all hers,'" hers meaning the old woman, never seen, who supposedly occupies an upstairs bedroom. Marian certainly becomes hers. It is not only that her visits to the old woman's sitting room grow more and more frequent; that she carries fresh flowers there daily; that she pro-

pitiates her unseen host with bits of furniture and meals on silver trays. But Marian also begins to sit in "her" chair, to eat "her" meals, to dress in "her" clothes. Apparently, she also begins to look like her, her hair growing grayer day by day. Of course, Marian is rewarded for her efforts: the swimming pool mends its own cracks, repairs its own filter; the greenhouse and the garden come to life; and the old shingles and tiles fall from Allardyce like scales, new ones gleaming underneath. But the price for this grand-scale spring cleaning is pretty steep: first Aunt Elizabeth dies, then son David and husband Ben. And Marian will, too, eventually, but not before Allardyce has drained every particle of life from her bones. For Allardyce is a parasite, a leech that has sucked Marian of family feeling and responsibility and deluded her into thinking that it is a vital part of her, "a reflection of what she was or could be inside, at her best."<sup>57</sup> A demon child, Allardyce has beguiled Marian into assuming that her motherly love is being returned, when in fact, once she is suckled dry, she will be discarded like all the others.

But for a time, at least, Marian is Allardyce, the source of its strength and rejuvenation, its raison d'être. She will take her place in the upstairs bedroom where the continuous hum is heard, eating the frugal meals Allardyce's next "mother" carries to her, energizing the thirty-odd rooms, the pool, the greenhouse, until finally, the parasite relinquishes its hold and the only thing Marian will be responsible for nurturing is the grass that covers her grave.

For the most part, Burnt Offerings marks the end of a two hundred year evolution. Even the most current novels about the Bad Place, James Kahn's Poltergeist and Jay Anson's 666, do little more than perpetuate a trend begun in The Castle of Otranto. However, at least one other novel must be included in our discussion of the haunted house, a novel that is the culmination of the creative efforts of writers from Walpole to Poe to James to Jackson. This novel is, of course, The Shining. In it Stephen King succeeds in conjuring up every vision of evil his strict Methodist upbringing had ever even obliquely hinted at, making the Overlook, the focus of his finest book, a panoramic horror show, a terrifying portrait of the facets of evil.

Lauding the kinship of King's novel with gothic ghost stories haunted by veiled, waxen corpses capable of eliciting three fainting spells in six minutes from any respectable sentimental heroine may be much like extolling VD because it led to the discovery of penicillin, but Stephen King can no more escape the grasp of Walpole or Reeve than Jack Torrance can the Overlook. For while The Shining may lack traditional gothic properties, creaking doors and secret passageways, for instance, it bears resemblance to its ancestors in several other ways. It is, essentially, the story of a family struggling against its own disintegration, a disintegration actually furthered by the Bad Place. Its cast is small, each character mimicking the gothic romance staple still used in literature today: Jack Torrance, a writer and ex-English teacher whose pent-up aggression makes him the Overlook's ideal hench-

man, is the equivalent of Manfred or Oleron; Danny, a child born with a caul and capable of both telepathy and precognition-- the "shining," Dick Hallorann, the Overlook's cook, tells him-- is a pint-sized version of the traditional hero, a remnant of Blackwood's Tim; Wendy Torrance, the modern equivalent of the typical whey-faced little woman, is a generally ineffectual creature who can, in the name of maternity, call forth an incredible amount of strength and nerve; and the Overlook itself, the "apotheosis of the Bad Place,"<sup>58</sup> is, like Usher or Udolpho, the personification of evil as well as Jack's double and the embodiment of the insecurities and aggression he attempts to repress, part of a world where conventional morality does an about-face, where good is evil, and evil, good.

The Overlook's kinship to its haunted ancestors is seen, more importantly, in the fact that, like every Bad Place, King's hotel is horribly askew. The Presidential Suite, the site of a violent gang-style massacre, is stained with blood and bits of brain that form the outline of a human profile, mouth gaping wide. An old-fashioned fire extinguisher hangs in an upstairs hallway, an immense coiled-up snake that actually inches its way across the carpeting. In the Colorado Lounge, customers dead for thirty years sip whiskey sours while Jack, the only human in the room, chats with the bartender and guzzles imaginary martinis that in fact leave him wasted. On several nights, the Overlook becomes Prospero's abbey, strewn with costumed party-goers who come to life at the chiming of a glass-domed clock like so many



representatives of the Red Death. The masterpiece of terror, of course, is the woman in room 217. In her sixties, rich, she comes to the Overlook with a young male escort who pinches waitresses when his "lover" isn't looking. When he deserts her, she commits suicide in her suite, and it is some time before her body is found. It is Danny, warned specifically against entering 217 by Dick Hallorann, who has himself seen the "thing" inside, who first sees her:

The woman in the tub had been dead a long time. She was bloated and purple, her gas-filled belly rising out of the cold, ice-rimmed water like some fleshy island. Her eyes were fixed on Danny's, glassy and huge, like marbles. She was grinning, her purple lips pulled back in a grimace. Her breasts lolled. Her pubic hair floated. Her hands were frozen on the knurled porcelain sides of the tub. . . .

Still grinning, her huge marble eyes fixed on him, she was sitting up. Her dead palms made squittering noises on the porcelain. Her breasts swayed like ancient cracked punching bags. There was the minute sound of breaking ice shards. She was not breathing. She was a corpse, and dead long years.

Danny turned and ran. . . . He ran full-tilt into the outside door of 217, which was now closed. He began hammering on it, far beyond realizing that it was unlocked, and he had only to turn the knob to let himself out. His mouth pealed forth deafening screams that were beyond human auditory range. He could only hammer on the door and hear the dead woman coming for him, bloated belly, dry hair, outstretched hands-- something that had lain slain in that tub for perhaps years, embalmed there in magic.

The door would not open, would not, would not, would not.

And then the voice of Dick Hallorann came to him, so sudden and unexpected, so calm, that his locked vocal cords opened and he began to cry weakly-- not with fear but with blessed relief.

(I don't think they can hurt you. . . they're like

pictures in a book. . . close your eyes and they'll be gone.)

His eyelids snapped down. His hands curled into balls. His shoulders hunched with the effort of concentration;

(Nothing there nothing there not there at all NOTHING THERE THERE IS NOTHING!)

Time passed. And he was just beginning to relax, just beginning to realize that the door must be unlocked and he could go, when the years-damp, bloated, fish-smelling hands closed softly around his throat and he was turned <sup>59</sup>impacably around to stare into that dead and purple face.

While we can argue that in The Shining man is-- at least initially-- responsible for the evil that lingers in the Overlook, King's hotel, like Allardyce and Hill House, is itself a malevolent force indiscriminate as to whom it harms. We know, for example, that its ghosts cannot be propitiated: only a year earlier the Overlook's previous caretaker had massacred his wife and twin daughters during a fit of what the hotel's manager euphemistically deemed "cabin fever." Had this been an expiational sacrifice, and the family surrogates, scapegoats forced to suffer for every wrong ever committed there, the Overlook's hauntings should have come to an end. But such is not the case.

One explanation for the persistence of evil and the seeming impossibility of expiation in King's haunted hotel may simply involve the sheer number of Bad Things that have happened in the Bad Place, each one revivable by any person with enough of a shine to activate them. This "psychic battery" theory, a theory King first used in connection with the Marsten House of 'Salem's Lot, a house Matt Burke called a "kind of

evil dry-cell; a malign storage battery,"<sup>60</sup> while not, as we saw in Blackwood's "Empty House," original, is brought to perfection in The Shining. Like the Marsten House, the Overlook absorbs emotions, particularly the primitive ones, King notes, rage and hate and fear, and then re-projects them in a kind of "paranormal movie show."<sup>61</sup> As Dick Hallorann so succinctly puts it:

It seems that all the bad things that ever happened here, there's little pieces of these things still lay-in around like fingernail clippings or the boogers that somebody nasty just wiped under a chair. I don't know why it should just be here, there's bad goings-on in just about every hotel in the world, I guess, and I've<sup>62</sup> worked in a lot of them and had no trouble. Only here.

To answer Dick's question-- why here-- we need to consider the Overlook a bit more carefully. Numbers alone cannot account for the fact that the hotel's ghosts, its evil, seems perpetual. And once the element of revenge is eliminated, doubts as to whether or not these "things" operate under their own volition, arise. If the woman in 217-- along with the rest of the Overlook's ghostly cast-- isn't seeking personal retribution, what is it she wants? Perhaps the answer lies partly in the significance found in the hotel's name. It is not simply an ever-green-gorged valley that King's Bad-Place overlooks; rather, it overlooks-- or over sees-- evil, both in terms of the specific evil committed by one man (which the hotel, like any good foreman, instructs Jack to do; as the Overlook's caretaker, he is required to follow its orders), and in terms of the general evil accrued since the hotel's

opening. Unlike the haunted gothic castle, the Overlook is not separable from the evil occurring within it; the evil seems, in fact, to be at least partially powered by the house itself-- which helps to explain why there are so many psychic ghosts here when equally horrible things have happened in dozens of other places. The Overlook, itself representative of the imbalanced human mind, can, as was the case with previous Bad Places, somehow sense a lack of balance in others. And like an immense magnet, it draws out the factors responsible for that imbalance and enlarges them, a simple task in an environment so conducive to violence and terror as the Overlook is. But by "conducive environment" I mean that the Overlook is a whiz at preying on unconscious fears and desires and by mirroring them, capable of creating an atmosphere in which those same fears and desires can become reality; I don't mean to infer that a hotel full of walking corpses can be explained away as a simple case of self-fulfilling prophecy or mass hypnosis, as Jack, sounding too much like Ann Radcliffe for his own good, attempts to do. Jack and Wendy do learn, eventually, of all the nasty occurrences that have threatened the Overlook's reputation over the years, but their awareness does not necessarily coincide with or cause the arrival of the ghosts; furthermore, Danny is aware of the hotel's bloody history long before his parents are, and no one has told him anything. Those ghosts are real, but they are more akin to twentieth century vampires than they are to eighteenth century spirits because of the simple fact that they do not act under their own volition. Like 'Salem's Lot's



walking dead, the ghouls of the Overlook are merely henchmen-- but their "master," whose name is far better known than Barlow's, stands alone at the peak of the echelon of evil. Call him Satan, Lucifer, the Dark Prince, but see him sans horns and pitchfork and dragon's tail, for what he is in fact is Pure Evil, the core, the energy responsible for the existence of evil everywhere, not just in the Overlook, although it can certainly be seen as a world miniature-- or a hell miniature, each room, with its own violent history, equivalent to the various levels in Dante's Inferno. We see him only once, in the wasp body that has become the horror genre's traditional incarnation of Pure Evil, fleeing from an upstairs window as the Overlook, exploding, is ravaged by a blaze that should have made any brimstone lover feel more at home. But he is felt throughout the novel, the mortar that holds the hotel together, the force responsible for an atmosphere that breeds evil and then traps it within so that it can be re-inflicted on new victims. But the Evil One himself, the man who taught Iago his tricks and can so easily manipulate his prey by playing upon their conceptions of masculinity and pride, by harnessing the aggression they attempt to hold at bay, never so much as lifts a finger to flick a fly from a window pane. For the dirty work, he needs a henchman. And this time, no one short of Jack Torrance will do.

In Danse Macabre, King insists that all tales of horror belong to one of two categories: "those in which the horror results from an act of free and conscious will-- a conscious decision to do evil-- and those

in which the horror is predestinate, coming from outside like a stroke of lightning."<sup>63</sup> How, then, do we classify The Shining? To a large extent, the Overlook's evil is predestinate, emanating from sources-- the Bad Guy, the house itself and the sin that lingers there unexpiated-- not human and not humanly controllable. On the other hand, Jack Torrance plays a role in perpetuating that evil; the only question is, does he do so consciously? Perhaps not. Acting with conscious will implies that the actor be in possession of his sanity to begin with, and it doubtful that Jack is. Rather, he seems as schizoid as the double-headed roque mallet he wields, though in a sense, justifiably so. He suffers, for one thing, from a great deal of frustrated ambition. He is a writer who can't write, a teacher who has just been dismissed from a fairly prestigious New England prep school. Add his lack of financial and professional success to his tendency toward alcoholism and an occasional twinge of child abuse (read, "Jack Torrance has failed as husband and father") and the Overlook becomes Jack's last stand, the thread that binds his family and his self-esteem to him. He needs to prove himself, prove that he can survive without a fifth of gin, that he won't wrench his son's arm from its socket again, that he can provide for his own family. In the process of trying to be a good husband and father, however, he is also harboring an incredible amount of resentment. He is blatantly jealous of the affection Wendy shows for Danny-- she "croons" to him, Jack says-- and his refusal, although unheeded, to allow Danny to sleep in their bedroom after a

particularly frightening incident, seems to indicate that he is sexually jealous as well. Beyond these immediate sources of his aggression, Jack's childhood has also played a role in warping his personality. His father was a monster, a brutal, unpredictable beast who might one moment kiss his wife at the dinner table and the next batter her face with a cane while the rest of the family fixed on her glasses perched crazily on a mound of mashed potatoes. Living in this kind of environment, hating it, Jack nonetheless absorbs some of his father's violent inclinations, just as the Overlook absorbs the violence spent in it. And once Jack is a father himself, the cycle repeats itself: what his father did to him, he does to Danny, but once, only once, and he has no intention of ever harming his son again. Instead, like the Overlook, he holds his own "darkness" within, submerging his anger somewhere below the level of consciousness. Symbolically speaking, that somewhere is the Overlook's basement, a place for ghosts, Jack says, which is what his aggression is, a spectre that haunts him. Overflowing with moldy, yellowed newspapers and receipts, covered with cobwebs, lit by a single bulb, the basement is the only truly gothic room in the hotel, a fitting place for Jack to hide his own skeletons, a place where, among the rags and boxes, he first finds the clippings that reveal the Overlook's own unsavory past. Even the Overlook, it seems, has something to hide, and what better place than a dim basement, that murky compartment of the subconscious mind that it and Jack Torrance share.

Ultimately, the aggression that Jack tries to deny has to be released. The question is how. He can't drink away his anger; to do so after months of staying sober would be to admit to weakness. And he can't eliminate it gradually by raising his voice or slamming a door; Wendy, Mother Hen, runs to Danny's side every time Jack so much as raises an eyebrow. He does succeed in venting his bottled-up hostilities, however, in a series of memory/revenge sequences that he is probably not even conscious of. Jack forfeited his last instructorship when he lost his temper with a student and punched him out in the parking lot. George, the student, was a gorgeous kid with a rich papa and a bright future ahead of him. And Jack, intensely jealous of the young man whose life seemed destined to be a series of easy victories, harbored a great deal of resentment for him. Similarly jealous of his own son, he unconsciously identifies the two and when, after an extended flashback in which he recalls the details that led to his dismissal, he is feeling particularly embittered, he punishes Danny, George's surrogate. It is no accident that Danny awakes one night to find the "harmless" wasp nest his father had given him alive with vengeful, biting little beasts. Someone had to pay for what George did to Jack Torrance. Unfortunately, that someone was his own son.

Similar sequences occur throughout The Shining. Most of the memories that trigger Jack's need for revenge are his own. Remembering his cane-wielding father is painful; in retaliation, he hears his father's voice on the radio giving him permission to murder his wife and son--



"because each man kills the thing he loves"<sup>64</sup>-- just as Danny, upstairs, is being strangled by a dead woman, as if Jack's own aggression has been transferred to the Overlook so that it can take revenge for him. However, revenge is also prompted by the Overlook's own memories: once Jack is satiated with the hotel's dirty laundry (its past, its memory), he takes revenge by calling the ~~manager~~ and waving a bloody shirt, threatening to write an expose; when Danny, tunneling under the snow in the playground, revives another memory, awakening a "thing" that has in some unspecified way died there, the Overlook revenges itself by triggering a New Year's Eve party, complete with champagne and streamers and a sadistic homosexual in a dog's suit, terrorizing everyone but Jack, who has by this time come under the Overlook's spell. Attacking him where he is weakest-- smack in the middle of his self-esteem-- the Overlook succeeds in turning Jack's sense of morality upside-down: Wendy and Danny are ingrates who don't love the Overlook as they should-- i.e., who don't love Jack as they should; to smash them into bloody pulps with a roque mallet is to "show them the error of their ways." And Jack, unstable to begin with, is easily swayed by the hotel because it has become for him a kind of father figure, and he sorely wants from it the respect and attention his own father never gave him. He may think that he and the Overlook are "simpático," Johnson and Boswell, a team, and there is, obviously, a great deal of identification between them: in The Shining, the hotel is Jack, his subconscious mind, the place where all thoughts are allowed free reign.

The subconscious is responsible for dreams, and it is as if in the Overlook, Jack's dreams, violence-filled because of the aggression he represses, become real-- they are, in one sense, the ghosts that haunt the Overlook. On another level, however, Jack is kept carefully distinct from the hotel. He is being used, trapped, tricked. It is not important that the Overlook's henchman be Jack Torrance; what is important is that he be like Jack Torrance. When Grady, another ghost, the Overlook's previous henchman, tells Jack that he has "always been the caretaker," he doesn't literally mean that Jack has always served the hotel; he means that Jack's type-- the aggressive type-- has always been the Overlook's chosen. The hotel is not his friend, and while he may be unaware of this, Danny is not. He knows that like the loaded dice his daddy gave him for Christmas, everything at the Overlook is a "lie and a cheat," and he tries to tell his father so. But by then it is too late: forfeiting all that it means to be human, Jack has become, as Danny says, "it." "You're not my daddy," he cries to the thing swinging a mallet streaked with his mother's blood. "You're the hotel."<sup>65</sup>

The pantry Wendy locks Jack in acts as the last grip of a twisted mind on sanity and morality. Unfortunately, the Overlook's grip is stronger, but in one sense, even that is positive: freeing Jack unleashes in him the fury that eventually leads to a kind of expiation. And while Jack's only thought may be to murder his wife and son, what he in fact accomplishes is weirdly Christ-like: his own death is an

atonement for his own and others' sins. And if in one sense smashing his face with the mallet and erasing his identity, his humanity, is meant to identify him with Pure Evil, in another, it identifies him with Pure Good, for despite his intentions, he is responsible for the destruction of the Overlook as well as its ghosts.

But The Shining's didacticism ends there. Standing, the Overlook may represent evil and unexpiated sin; it may represent Jack Torrance, a twisted, violent man attempting to come to terms with hostility and guilt and a lack of self-esteem-- and failing. But conversely, when the Overlook lies in ruins, its windows shattered, its chimneys belching smoke and flame, it doesn't represent the triumph of good. Instead, the manta escapes. And somewhere, the hauntings will begin anew.

And begin they did. 1978 saw Anne River Siddons' The House Next Door and Jay Anson's The Amityville Horror, the precursor to his 1981 novel about the Bad Place, 666; in 1982, the current haunted bestseller is, of course, Poltergeist. Dates, however, can be misleading, for in fact, the haunted house of the 1980's differs little from that of a hundred or even two hundred years ago. True, gothic mansions have given way to twentieth century architectural wizardry, and ghosts have shed their white sheets, but as a symbol, the Bad Place continues to function as a repository for unexpiated sin and as a psychological mirror. For that consistency we have, on one hand, human nature to thank: the flaws, the sins that put the "haunt" in the haunted house are, after all,

our flaws, our sins. On another level, however, a fairly obscure writer named Horace Walpole deserves our acclaim. For even though Walpole's Bad Place may make us laugh more often than shudder, it marked the beginning of a nightmare that will probably outlive us all.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Robert Frost, "The Death of the Hired Man," The Poetry of Robert Frost (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 38.
- <sup>2</sup> Stephen King, 'Salem's Lot (New York: New American Library, 1976), p. 282.
- <sup>3</sup> Its components are equatable with the various levels of the psyche. The exterior of the house represents human physical and mental appearance. The roof and upper floor symbolize the head and mind; the basement represents the subconscious, the hidden depths of the mind; the stairs and hallways stand as the links between the psychic levels.
- <sup>4</sup> Stephen King, Danse Macabre (New York: Everest House, 1981), p. 254.
- <sup>5</sup> H.P. Lovecraft, Supernatural Horror in Literature (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1973), p. 24.
- <sup>6</sup> Eino Railo, The Haunted Castle (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1927), p. 5.
- <sup>7</sup> Elizabeth MacAndrew, The Gothic Tradition in Fiction (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 15.
- <sup>8</sup> Clara Reeve, Preface to The Old English Baron (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 3.
- <sup>9</sup> Reeve, p. 4.
- <sup>10</sup> Lovecraft, p. 27.
- <sup>11</sup> Edith Birkhead, The Tale of Terror (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1963), p. 51.